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PRELUDES FOR A PRESIDENT

Why the stars have lined up to play at US inaugurations

WHAT MADE MOZART TICK?

The febrile and sometimes filthy mind of a creative genius

BBC RADIO 3
Full January listings inside
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EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

ANGEL BLUE

Pageants, Proms & Puccini: the dazzling rise of a great American soprano

Patricia Routledge

The forgotten musical past of a television comedy legend

The pain of love

Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin*: the ultimate tale of rejection

Elisabetta de Gambarini

Meet the Georgian era piano pioneer

Anthony McGill

The clarinettist fighting for equality

The wonder of whales

Nature's long-distance choral singers

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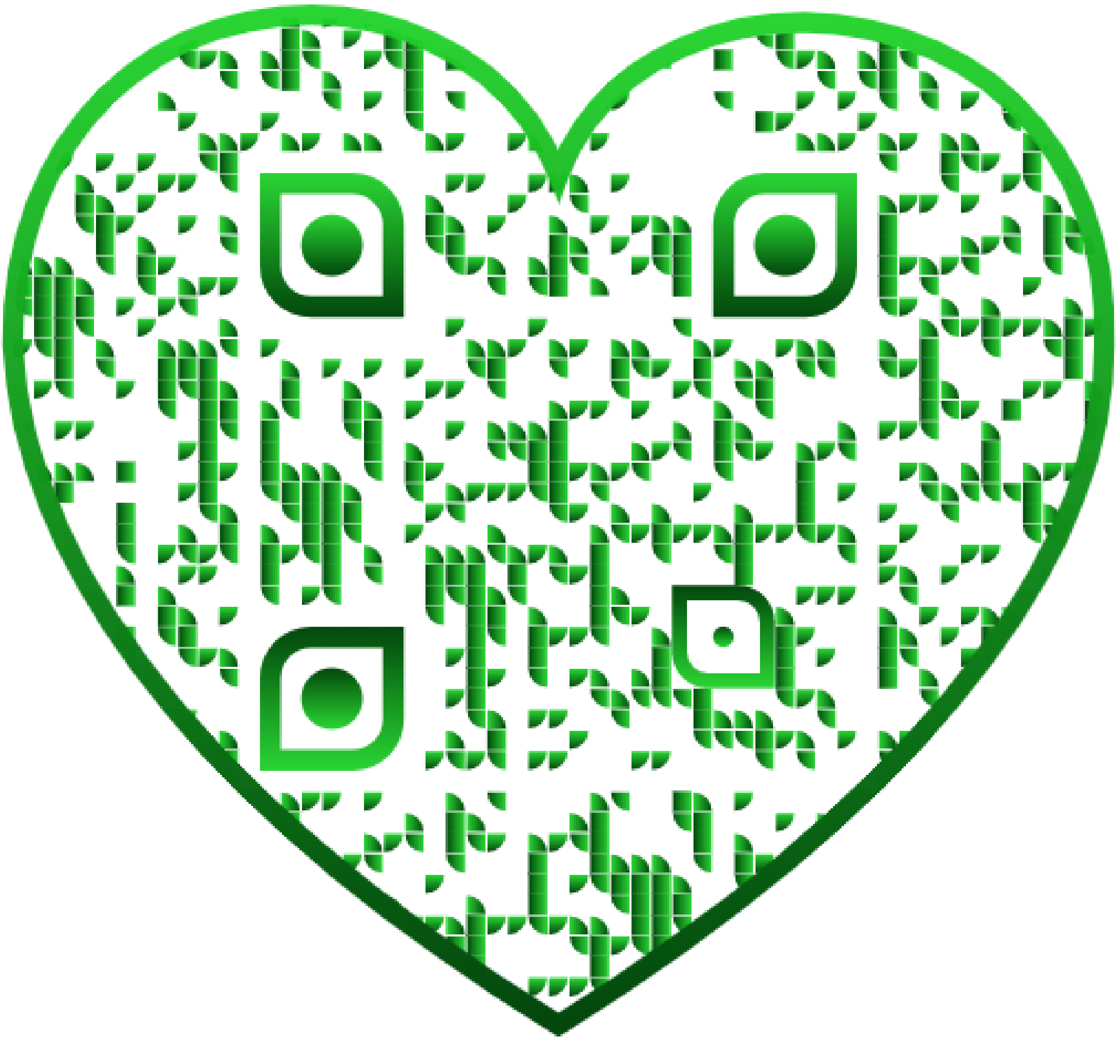
How Stalin's opera walk-out left Shostakovich terrified

The composers who thumbed their noses at authority

Why do top boffins love the sound of classical music?



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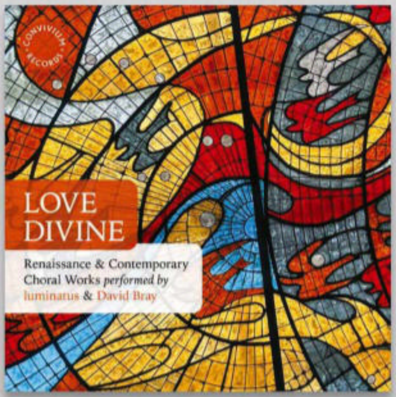

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Welcome

America is on our minds as we start this new year and bid fond farewell to a quarter-century. Our cover star is the vibrant US soprano Angel Blue, whose leading operatic roles on both sides of the Atlantic herald her arrival as one of the world's top sopranos (p24). And on page 30 we meet Anthony McGill, principal clarinettist of the New York Philharmonic and a leading advocate for greater diversity in the classical world.

As President Trump prepares to be sworn in for the second time on the frosty steps of Washington's Capitol, Terry Blain looks back at the music performed during past presidential inaugurations – and what those works can tell us about the ambitions and priorities for that politician's tenure (p52). Who could forget the inspiring sight of Yo-Yo Ma, Itzhak Perlman, Gabriela Montero – and one Anthony McGill – performing at the inauguration of President Obama in 2009... though that performance turned out to be mimed because of the freezing conditions!

If music can be used to inspire a nation, so too can it satirically subvert political and cultural movements, as Stephen Johnson explores on page 42. From Schumann's veiled mockery of superficial public tastes to Shostakovich's brave defiance of Stalin's dark regime, there's more in common between music and politics than first meets the eye... and ear.

Charlotte Smith *Editor*

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS

Stephen Johnson
Author and composer

'How does musical satire work? Can it ever truly bite? Words help identify the target, but when more is left to the imagination it can be even deadlier. And how safe are we, the listeners and co-conspirators? This really set me thinking.' ***Page 42***

Stephen Pritchard
Music journalist

'Elisabetta de Gambarini's life reads like a novel: she moved in high society, sang for Handel and was the first woman in England to publish her keyboard music. But she died young after a violent marriage and vile cover-up.' ***Page 62***

Amanda Holloway
Music journalist

'Picking a best *Die schöne Müllerin* is the surest way to lose friends, given that everyone's favourite singer – tenor, baritone, counter-tenor or even contralto – has recorded this pinnacle of Lieder cycles. But I've done it, gladly!' ***Page 66***

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COVER: JOHN MILLAR **THIS PAGE:** GETTY, JOHN MILLAR, SASHA GUSOV, MARTIN ROMERO

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Subscriptions £64.87 (UK); £65 (Europe); £74 (Rest of World) ABC Reg No. 3122

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Plus the composer whom we would most like to psychoanalyse (see p34)
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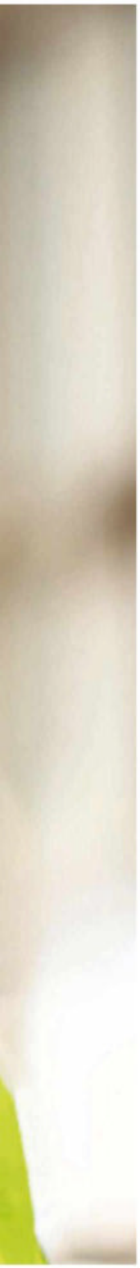

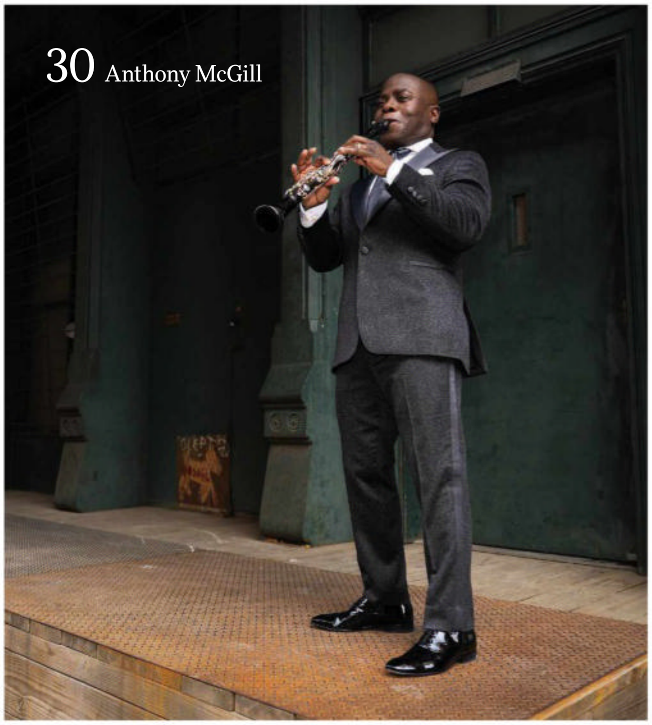

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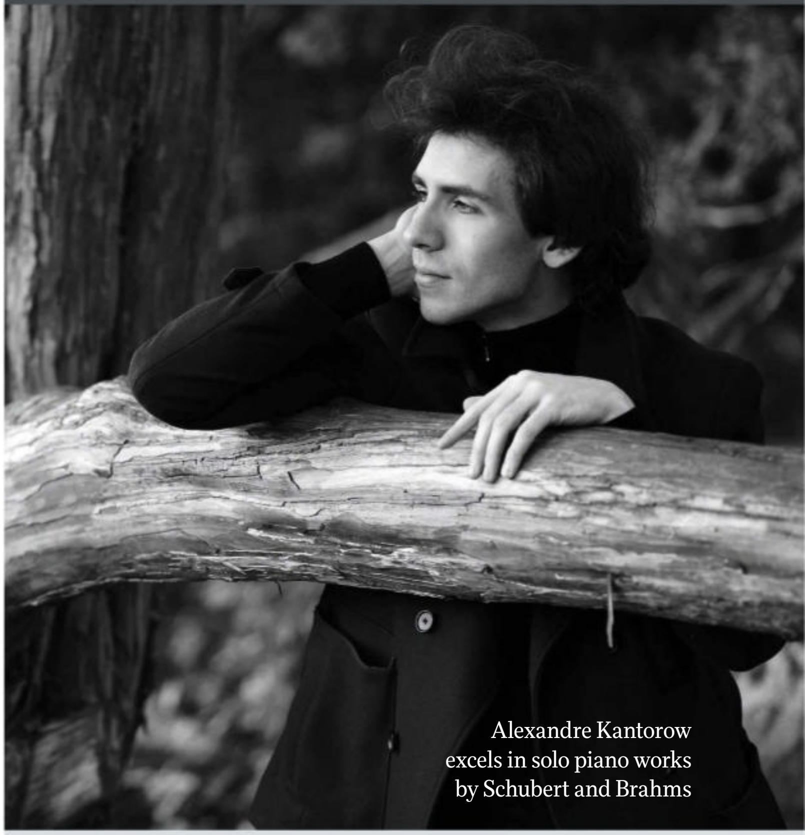
January reviews

Your guide to the best new recordings and books



Alexandre Kantorow excels in solo piano works by Schubert and Brahms

72 Recording of the Month

Alexandre Kantorow
Brahms and Schubert

'Kantorow's sound has the quality of a dark, warm roar from deep within the piano, highly coloured but never harsh'

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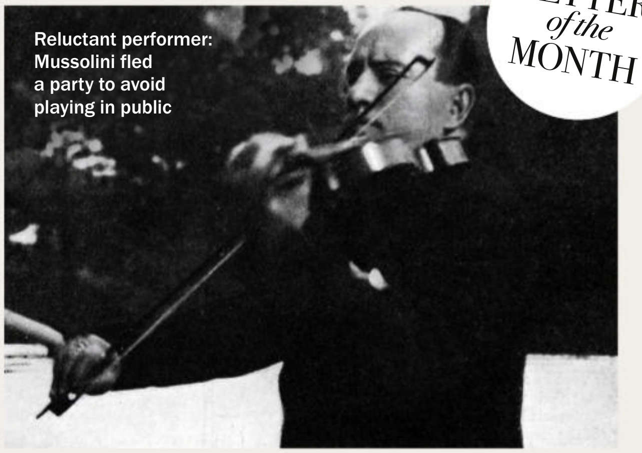
LETTER *of the* MONTH


Reluctant performer: Mussolini fled a party to avoid playing in public

Il Duce and the violin

In *Power Players* (December), Jeremy Pound comments that Mussolini's prowess as a violinist remains a matter of guesswork. We do have at least one revealing indication. In 1919, Arturo Toscanini heard the young Czech violinist Váša Příhoda playing in the Milan brasserie Café Grand d'Italia. Enthused, he told his friend, the wealthy socialite Margherita Sarfatti, who was also the Duce's political muse and lover. She suggested they arrange a recital for Příhoda at her salon, at which his brilliant performance received ecstatic applause from the assembled celebrities, including Mussolini. Sarfatti, seething because of his current affair with a much younger woman called Bianca Ceccato, now took her revenge by inviting Mussolini to play something for them. Given that there were fewer more exigent musicians than Toscanini and that the company had just heard a potentially great violinist, to expose a modest self-taught musician like Mussolini to their scrutiny was cruel. He begged Margherita to stop, and when she insisted, he fled the party.

Sir Paul Preston, *London*

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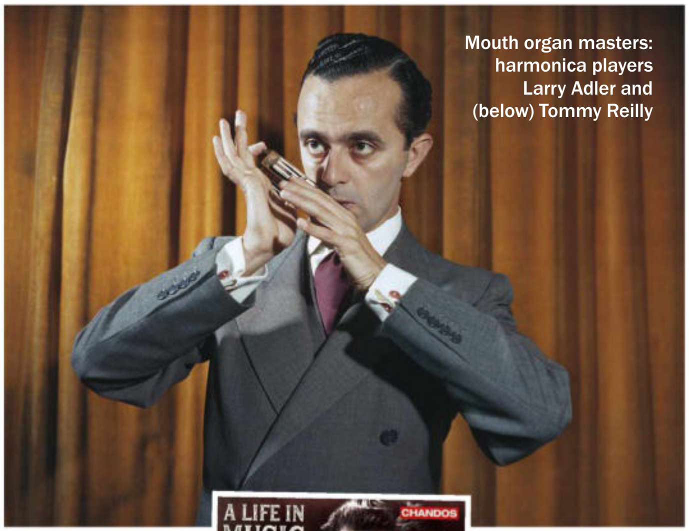
Magnificent Bevans

I hugely enjoyed Rebecca Franks's encounter with the Bevan Family Consort (*Family album*, Christmas issue). I quite understand it must have been a challenge to include so many notable singing members of the family, but there are two very distinguished Bevans of the previous generation who should not be forgotten. Mary's and Sophie's much-loved father David Bevan was born in 1951, and his sister Rachel in 1952 – they were two of the famous 14 children of Roger and Molly Bevan whom Rebecca mentioned, and members of the previous Bevan Family Choir. David was a very funny, self-effacing and greatly talented singer, organist and choirmaster, whom I met in Oxford and with whom I shared a flat in London. He became assistant and then acting master of music at Westminster Cathedral; he worked in the US and then for many years directed the choir at Holy Redeemer, Chelsea. He sadly developed Parkinson's disease and died in 2021. Rachel was an indispensable soprano in the pioneering years of the early music scene, with a voice of shining clarity, working with Andrew Parrott's Taverner Choir and many others. She taught singing at Downside for 27 years, but also sadly died in 2022. They were both wonderful people and good friends, and it's very moving to see the many talents of the large family continuing to flourish today.

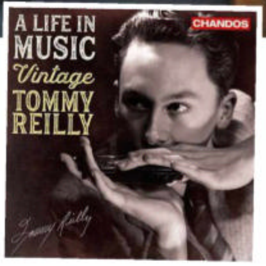
Sir Nicholas Kenyon, *London*

Christmas collection

With Christmas on the horizon, I always anticipate the festive edition of *BBC Music Magazine* with much interest, and also the inevitable controversy regarding the accompanying CDs. It is now over 30 years since I unexpectedly spotted *BBC Music* on the shelves of a shabby Post Office/newsagent shop in a somewhat less well-heeled part of my locality when nipping in for stamps. This turned out to be Issue No. 1 and I now have every issue since – plus a considerable rack of CDs which have introduced me to many pieces to which I would otherwise have paid little or no attention. I thoroughly enjoyed the very first CD of Christmas music and have, indeed, every one since – they make a change from the predictable and repetitive fare broadcast on many radio stations. These days, the Christmas season seems to start the day after Bonfire Night only to end abruptly on Boxing Day morning – mainly because at this point, after a two month onslaught, advertisers have turned their attention to selling something else. However, as someone old enough to remember when festivities started on Christmas Eve and



Mouth organ masters: harmonica players Larry Adler and (below) Tommy Reilly


A LIFE IN MUSIC
Vintage
TOMMY REILLY
CHANDOS

continued until Epiphany, I have established a routine of my own: during Advent, I largely avoid Christmas music and much of the associated razzmatazz. I then keep the spirit of the traditional season going by enjoying my amassed *BBC Music Magazine* Christmas CDs during the 12 Days of Christmas. Sometimes I even get to play them all!

***Nicholas K Hingley,** Halesowen*

Stand up for Handel

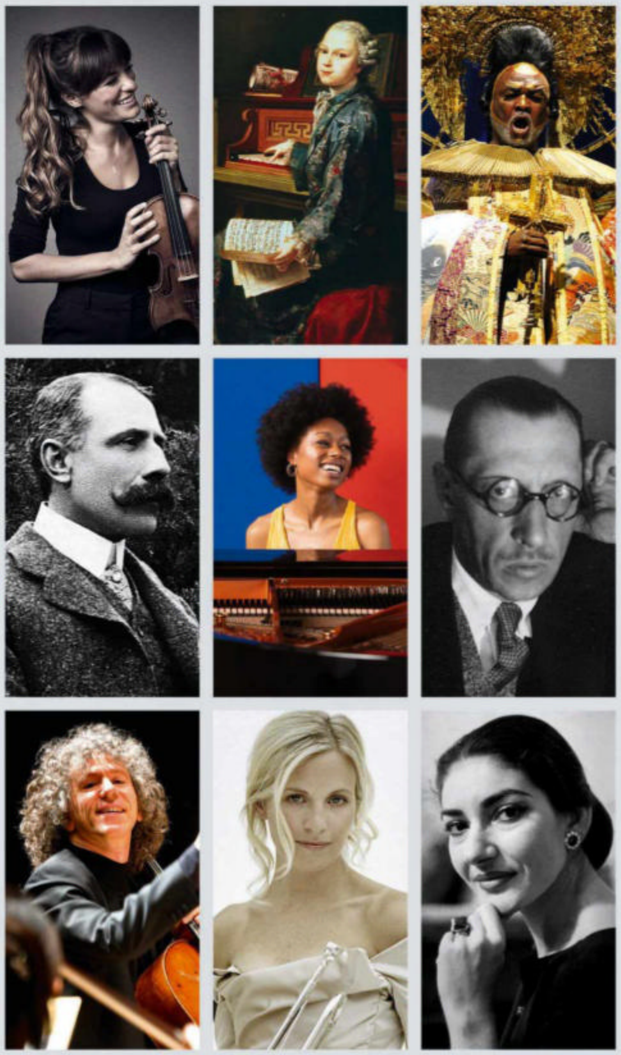
I read with interest Richard Morrison's excellent column on his seven ages of recorded music (December), but was flabbergasted at his statement that in order to listen to a complete performance of Handel's *Messiah* recorded on 78rpm discs, he would have to leap from his seat 38 times. I was about to write to point out that, as the recording was on two sides of 19 discs, he would only have to turn or change the discs 37 times. Just in time, however, my wife pointed out that he would also have to leap from his seat in order to stand for the Hallelujah Chorus! I should have realised that Richard would know his maths as well as his music.

***Rod Chisholm,** Fife*

Harmonica greats

Regarding John Perkins's 'Look, no fingers!' letter (November), let us get the facts right: on the chromatic harmonica, the right hand index finger is absolutely essential as it operates the slide which enables you to play in all keys. Tommy Reilly and Larry Adler established the chromatic harmonica as a legitimate concert instrument, and this is what Adler wrote in Reilly's obituary in *The Guardian*: 'Tommy was unique, in a class by himself. I will miss his wonderful playing, he didn't even have a close second.' Tommy Reilly's recordings of major original works for harmonica by such composers as Michael Spivakovsky, Vaughan Williams, Gordon Jacob, Malcolm Arnold, Vilém Tauský, Robert Farnon, James Moody, Villa-Lobos et al are available on the Chandos label.

Sigmund Groven,
Oslo, Norway



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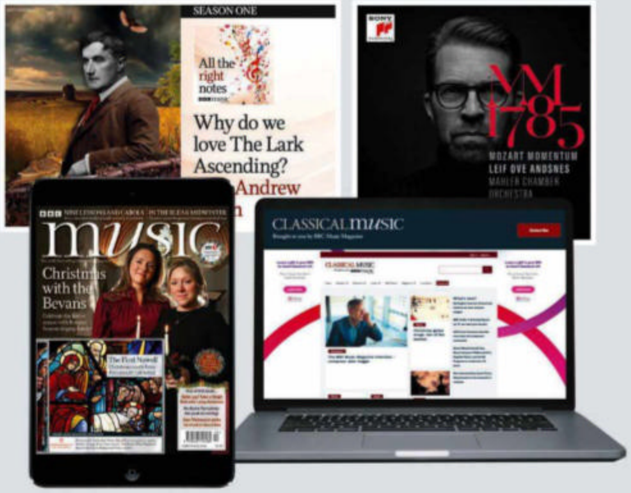
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Angel Blue

Blue horizon

Star of the 2024 Last Night of the Proms, soprano Angel Blue has taken the opera world by storm on both sides of the Atlantic – it's a long way from local beauty pageants in California, as she tells Ashutosh Khandekar

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BBC music MAGAZINE

The *full* score

Our pick of the month's news, views and interviews

Good things come in threes: (left to right) composers Roxanna Panufnik, Gavin Bryars and Errollyn Wallen with their trophies at The Ivors Classical Awards

HOGAN MEDIA/SHUTTERSTOCK

Winners announced at Ivors 2024

Outstanding composers honoured at star-studded bash

Gavin Bryars, Roxanna Panufnik and Errollyn Wallen were among the well-known names to be recognised at the 2024 Ivors Classical Awards, held to celebrate the flourishing health of composing in the UK and beyond. At a sparkling ceremony at the Southbank in London, presented by BBC Radio 3's Kate Molleson and Tom Service, awards were announced in eight categories that recognised the finest compositions and sound art installations of the previous 12 months, while a number of special presentations were made to composers who have also made a particularly distinguished contribution in the longer term.

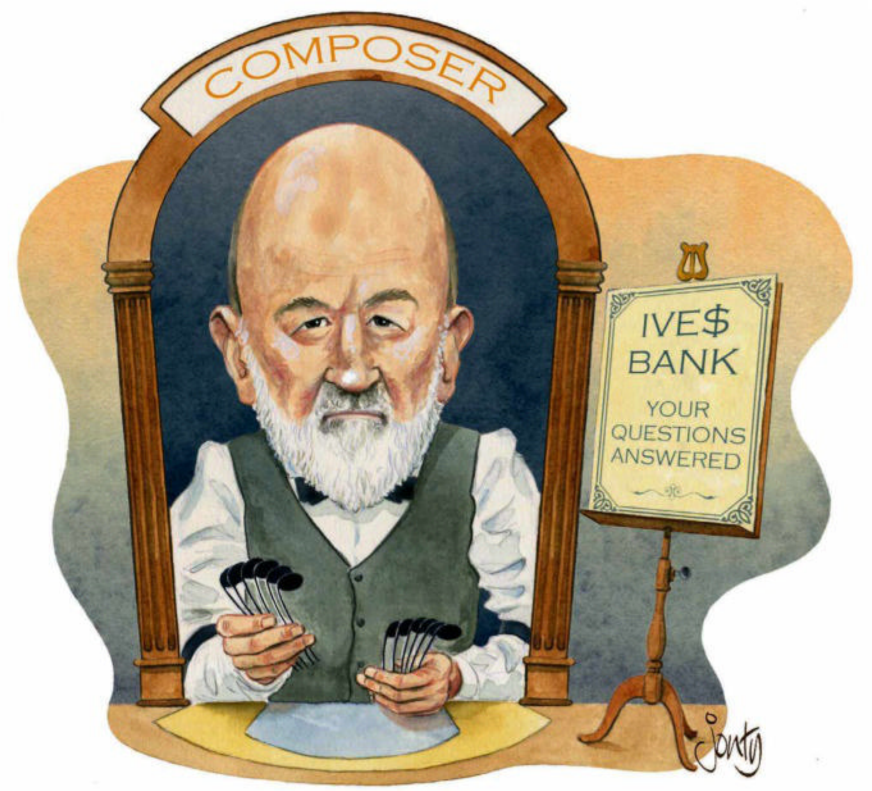
Topping the list of the latter was Errollyn Wallen, the new Master of the King's Music, who was inducted as the 28th Fellow of The Ivors Academy in recognition of a lifetime's work that has brought about an exceptional catalogue of 22 operas plus a range of orchestral, chamber and vocal compositions. She joins an esteemed group of fellow Academy Fellows that includes the likes of James MacMillan, John Rutter, Judith Weir, Julian Joseph, Sting, Annie Lennox, Paul McCartney, Kate Bush and Bruce Springsteen.

> Panufnik was recognised for her 'consistently exceptional' body of work

For the 'consistently exceptional body of classical compositions' throughout her career, meanwhile, Roxanna Panufnik received the prize for Outstanding Works Collection. Boasting a portfolio that ranges from string quartets to operas and often embraces styles from beyond traditional western classical music – not least in her *Four World Seasons*, written for violinist Tasmin Little in 2012 – Panufnik has had a particularly busy, and high-profile, last couple of years. In 2022, her opera *Dalia*, a work that addressed the refugee crisis in the context of women's cricket, enjoyed acclaim at its premiere at Garsington Opera, and last year her *Coronation Sanctus* was one of 12 works specially commissioned for the coronation of Charles III at Westminster Abbey.

And in appreciation of a groundbreaking body of music that stretches back to 1969's *The Sinking of the Titanic* and *Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet* from 1971, an Innovation Award was presented to Gavin Bryars, now 81. The award's citation specifically mentioned Bryars's 'innovative approach to composition and the impact that music has had on fellow composers', and it was that spirit of invention that marked out the winners of many of the evening's eight main categories.

These included Cassandra Miller's *The City, Full Of People* in the Choral category and Matthew Herbert's *The Horse* for orchestra, horse skeleton and electronics in the Large Ensemble Composition prize. Scored for altogether more conventional forces is Gavin Higgins's Horn Concerto – premiered by Ben Goldscheider in January 2024 – which won the Best Orchestral Composition category, while Dan Jones's *Each Tiny Drop*, a beautiful evocation of water that celebrates the connections between Manchester and Pakistan, took the Best Sound Art award.



Interest rates in Ives raised as bank notes local composer

A US bank is paying its respects to a famous local music hero by officially renaming itself – what was until recently the Savings Bank of Danbury is now the Ives Bank, in honour of Charles Ives, born in Danbury, Connecticut, 150 years ago. The 175-year-old business, whose significant role in keeping the pioneering composer's name alive in his home patch has included helping to fund the restoration of his house, has 16 branches in Connecticut. We'd like to suggest further branches at three places in New England, and possibly one at New York's Central Park, to open only at night.

Hollywood music mania spreads to station

Wickedly good: Jeff Goldblum struts his stuff at St Pancras

No sooner have we reported on Tom Cruise playing the organ at the Royal Albert Hall (Christmas issue) than we learn of his fellow Hollywood star Jeff Goldblum tickling the ivories at St Pancras Station. In London for the release of the movie *Wicked*, Goldblum delighted passers-by with some jazz noodling around 'Walking in a Winter Wonderland' on the station's Yamaha upright, displaying skills honed over 30 years of learning the piano. Should we now hear of, say, Brad Pitt plinking the harpsichord in Hyde Park or Scarlett Johansson squeezing the accordion on Oxford Street, you'll read about it here too.

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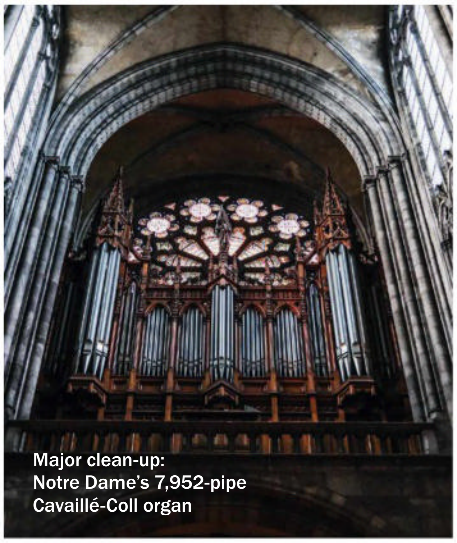


Major clean-up: Notre Dame's 7,952-pipe Cavaillé-Coll organ

Parisian pipe dreams

As this issue goes to press, Paris's Notre Dame cathedral is due to re-open to the public, more than five years after the iconic building was gutted by fire. The opening words from the Archbishop of Paris in welcoming back worshippers are set to be 'Awake oh organ, Let God's praise be heard!', which will be metaphorical music to the ears of those who are looking forward to hearing the cathedral's Cavaillé-Coll instrument again at some point soon. Remarkably, the organ was relatively unscathed by the April 2019 inferno, though a clean-up of toxic lead monoxide dust in its 7,952 pipes has been required. Shortly before the fire, titular organist Olivier Latry displayed the great beast at its best with his recording *Bach To The Future*, which was then shortlisted for the BBC Music Magazine Instrumental Award in 2020.

Flat Puccini in Milan

A celebratory gala to mark the 100th anniversary of Puccini's death on 29 November fell horribly flat when, just five minutes before curtain up, the orchestral musicians of La Scala, Milan, went on strike. While management desperately tried to bring some fizz to the occasion in the form of liquid refreshment, a piano was wheeled onto stage and in-house répétiteur James Vaughan hastily recruited to accompany tenor Jonas Kaufmann (above) and sopranos Anna Netrebko and Mariangela Sicilia in arias from *Tosca, Turandot* and all. Pianist and starry singers alike were given a standing ovation by the audience, whose tickets are to be reimbursed by the opera house.

Rising Star

Today's up-and-coming talent offer advice for their peers

New joys: 'How can you make music relatable?'

Conductor Michael Repper on how to build new audiences for little-known pieces of music

We're lucky to live in a world where there is so much incredible repertoire. I could live to the age of 150 and perform a new concert every day of my life, and there would still be new music to do at the end! So I take great pride in seeking out and performing music that I think is very special and that people may not know. But how to introduce this new repertoire successfully? I think it comes down to three things.

Firstly, research and find music that speaks to you personally, that you can connect with viscerally. Secondly, share this music with enthusiasm and excitement. Yes, do the usual accompanying stuff – a pre-concert talk, for example – but with new music, you need to go a bit further: how can you make this music truly relatable?

A few months ago, I performed Amy Beach's Piano Concerto with the Ashland Symphony Orchestra. It's a phenomenal piece, but not yet that well known. So, we had Leanne Curtis, director of the Women's Philharmonic Advocacy, come to meet with our fanclub, a huge group of young people. We had a discussion about programming unfamiliar music, and now these kids will be thinking about these things as they go forth into the music industry.

The last step is, of course, to perform this music to the highest level. Give the orchestra time to truly marinate in this unfamiliar music and pour your own soul into it. Audiences can tell if you're not 'in' the music. If you want them to love it, you have to be its very best advocate.

Michael Repper tours with the Ashland SO and Mid-Atlantic Symphony in spring 2025. See mikerepper.com/calendar.html

TIMEPIECE This month in history

JANUARY 1936

Stalin's operatic storm-out strikes fear in Shostakovich

For Joseph Stalin, general secretary of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union, the evening of 26 January 1936 should have been a routine date in his diary. A self-styled opera lover, Stalin was attending the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow to catch up belatedly on a work that had premiered to great acclaim two years previously in Leningrad, and been performed around 200 times in the Soviet Union since. In fact, no fewer than three productions of Dmitri Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* were running in Moscow at the time, and successful stagings in both Europe and the US had catapulted the 29-year-old composer into the global arena.

Unfortunately, Stalin did not like what he saw. Three acts into Shostakovich's four-act opera he left the theatre, apparently unable to stomach more. What particularly riled him? The sensationally in-your-face plot – a woman in Tsarist Russia, oppressed and exploited by a succession of men, becomes a triple-murderer – was one problem. Violent and sexually explicit, it offered a chaotically unstable view of human relationships, dramatically at odds with the state-ordered, morally conservative equilibrium the Communist authorities sought to propagate. Shostakovich's music was correspondingly in-your-face, especially in the convulsive sex scenes, 'complete

A terrifying performance: (main pic) the Bolshoi Theatre, Moscow, where Stalin left *Lady Macbeth* before the end; (above) the young Shostakovich; (above left) Stalin, a leader not to be messed with

with ejaculatory trombone slides', as one commentator has put it. Throw in a dash of anti-police satire in Act Three, and the recipe for thoroughly antagonising the Soviet Union's most powerful citizen was complete.

Shostakovich was in the Bolshoi Theatre that evening, and knew that Stalin was too. When he saw the general secretary leave before the end, the composer realised the signs were ominous. 'I was called out by the audience and took a bow,' he wrote to a friend later. 'My only regret is that I did not do so after the third act. Feeling sick at heart, I collected my briefcase and went to the station.'

Just two days later, a review of *Lady Macbeth* appeared in *Pravda* ('Truth'), the Communist Party newspaper. Headlined 'Muddle Instead of Music', the unsigned article castigated the opera in the most brutally dismissive fashion. 'Singing is replaced by shrieking,' it raged. 'The music quacks, hoots, pants and gasps for breath in order to present the love scenes as naturalistically as possible.' The work as a whole was 'coarse, primitive and vulgar', and designed to 'tickle the perverted taste of the bourgeoisie'. Such an approach, the reviewer warned, 'could only end badly'.

This scarcely veiled threat certainly unsettled Shostakovich, and rumours that Stalin himself had written the article began to circulate. He had not, but *Pravda* was a state-sanctioned publication, and the views expressed therein were automatically assumed to have the leader's imprimatur. Erstwhile friends began to abandon Shostakovich, and the composers' union dutifully condemned his opera. Performances sputtered to a halt, and it would not appear again on the Soviet stage until 1963, in a partially sanitised version entitled *Katerina Izmailova*.

The furore over *Lady Macbeth* did not stop Shostakovich composing, despite the heightened level of scrutiny he was now subjected to by the Communist leadership. The Fourth Symphony followed soon after – though, for fear of causing similar displeasure, was soon hidden away without a performance – as did the first of his 15 string quartets. In 1978, Shostakovich's friend Mstislav Rostropovich recorded *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* in its full original form in London, confirming it as one of the searing operatic achievements of the 20th century. Stagings of the opera are now relatively common, and it always had a special place in Shostakovich's heart – when evacuating the Nazi-threatened Leningrad in 1941, it was the only score he took with him. ***Terry Blain***

'Singing is replaced by shrieking. The music quacks, hoots, pants and gasps'

GETTY

Admirable depth: contralto Clara Butt

Also in January 1936...

4th: *Billboard* magazine publishes it first ever **Hit Parade**, a pop chart based on the best-selling records from the previous week. Ten records are listed on the inaugural chart, which is topped by jazz violinist Joe Venuti's 'Stop, Look and Listen'.

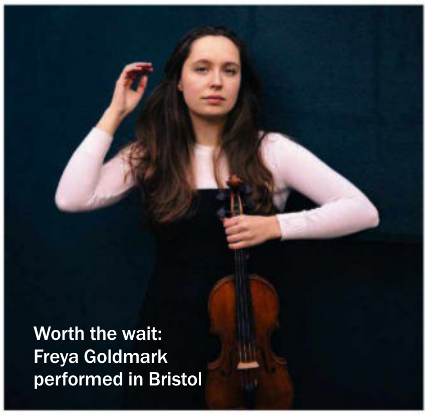
4th: At Twickenham, **England** beats New Zealand, the 'All Blacks', at rugby union for the first time, having suffered defeats in their two previous meetings. Two of England's tries in a 13-0 scoreline are scored by debutant Prince Alexander Obolensky, a Saint Petersburg-born Oxford University undergraduate whose family had fled Russia in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.

17th: In an address to 18,000 National Socialist supporters at the Deutschland Hall in Berlin, minister of propaganda **Joseph Goebbels** calls for Germany to reclaim the territories it lost in the Treaty of Versailles and to invest in re-armament rather than comestibles. 'We can do without butter but, despite all our love of peace, not without arms,' he says.

20th: At 11.55pm, **George V** dies at Sandringham House, bringing an end to a reign as king of the United Kingdom that began in May 1910. As is later revealed publicly, Lord Dawson of Penn, a physician to the royal family, hastens the 70-year-old monarch's death with injections of morphine and cocaine so that it can be reported in the morning papers rather than in the 'less appropriate' evening journals.

23rd: The British contralto **Clara Butt** dies aged 63. While she only ever appeared in one opera – Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* – Butt enjoyed stardom in the concert hall and on disc. One of the highlights of her career came in October 1899, when she sang as the soloist in the world premiere of Elgar's *Sea Pictures* song cycle, a work the composer had written with her voice specifically in mind.

Music to my ears



Worth the wait: Freya Goldmark performed in Bristol

The *BBC Music Magazine* team's current favourites...

Charlotte Smith *Editor*

A trip to The Ivors Classical Awards is always part-entertaining (and the fabulous outfits did not disappoint) and part-inspirational. This year's event featured moving acceptance speeches from Innovation Award winner Gavin Bryars and Outstanding Works Collection winner Roxanna Panufnik, who received her trophy from long-time friend Tasmin Little. Plus, there was captivating live music from **Matthew Sharp**, who performed the Cello Concerto by Errollyn Wallen – herself a brand new Ivors Fellow.

Jeremy Pound *Deputy editor*

Whether haring around in the car or at home relaxing, putting on *Private Passions* on Radio 3 is a non-negotiable part of my Sunday routine. A particularly uplifting recent edition with interviewee Dame Lola Young featured the first movement of **Errollyn Wallen**'s *Photography* for strings, a work I didn't previously know. That movement is a busy, chugging affair, after which things turn more introspective for a couple of movements before the composer tells us to get a grip with a breezy finale. It's great stuff.

Michael Beek *Reviews editor*

I tend to get a bit grumpy about support acts and intervals, so enduring two of each ahead of a late-night performance by composer **Erland Cooper** and a brilliant string quartet led by violinist Freya Goldmark was quite the test. Their Bristol Beacon set included excerpts from Cooper's beautiful *Carve the Runes Then Be Content With Silence* – eloquent music that was more than worth the wait.

Steve Wright *Content producer*

I've been rereading John le Carré's spy novels and there's one body of music that perfectly complements this tense, bleak, paranoid world – the tense, bleak and paranoid string quartets of **Shostakovich**. Among many highlights is the slow movement of the Seventh, with its queasy rising and falling violin line that perfectly evokes le Carré's anxious, mistrustful universe. Every time I listen, I seem to hear a knock at the door...

In the hands of fate: soprano Sabine Devieilhe; (right & inset) opera heaven in La Scala's *Der Rosenkavalier*

Concert Heaven Concert Hell

Top artists recall their best and worst performances

THIS MONTH
Sabine Devieilhe *soprano*

CONCERT HEAVEN

R Strauss Der Rosenkavalier
Sabine Devieilhe (soprano) et al; Teatro alla Scala Orchestra/Kirill Petrenko
La Scala, Milan (October 2024)

This is a performance I did just a while ago at La Scala in Milan; I was singing Sophie in Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier.* For this performance I had the best team I could ever dream of. My Octavian was Kate Lindsey, a beautiful person and artist – we became really close during the rehearsals and performances. My Marschallin was Krassimira Stoyanova, who I have known for quite a long time – she's a monumental soprano, so I have the biggest admiration for her – and the maestro was Kirill Petrenko.

We did seven shows with quite a lot of rehearsal, so we had time to work. The orchestra was all about connecting with the maestro, which was very special. To have a group trusting a conductor is not always the case, especially with big orchestras – we sometimes feel the tensions and the difference of direction that an orchestra and conductor would like to take. But it all flowed together.

I was happy with my role and with my colleagues and I was in Milan with my kids. Everything was fluid and I was content; I was not missing anything – I was living the life of a working mum.

For anyone who knows *Rosenkavalier,* the *Terzet* at the very end of the piece is where everything comes together and Marschallin gives Octavian her freedom. It's very lyrical and ethereal music, and Kirill Petrenko was so involved in the music that something magical was happening. Time seemed to stop and go at the same time, with the audience so connected. And when Marschallin starts to sing, I wasn't facing the audience; I was looking to the corner and so could close my eyes, because I was not singing. I stood there thinking, 'I am so lucky,' and enjoying every little portamento Krassimira was doing; it was quite something.

CONCERT HELL

R Strauss Der Rosenkavalier

Sabine Devieilhe (soprano) et al; Zurich Philharmonia/Fabio Luisi

Zurich Opera (Zurich 2019)

Der Rosenkavalier is a very hard piece to learn as a soprano, especially the role of Sophie. I'm not a fluid German speaker, so it's a big stretch because Sophie is very chatty! My first Sophie was in Zurich. I was properly into the rehearsal process, which was way quicker than in Milan, and I got the flu. It wasn't a little cold; it was a 40-degree fever. I had two days off between the dress rehearsal and the opening night, and in these two days I was on my own thinking, 'When do I have to decide if I will not be able to sing?' My voice was okay but I couldn't get out of bed. I made the decision to call the opera house, which was a very tricky moment for me. They decided to call someone to step in, but because the opening night was the next day they told me they'd still need me to do the staging while someone sings in the pit. It happens a lot when they don't have a proper cover that knows the staging, but it was the first time for me.

On the day I was still in bed, but I had to get to the make-up call; I took paracetamol and left the house covered in scarves and a mask. I arrived and everyone was so supportive, which makes it difficult to call it 'hell'. I met my singing Sophie, who was my friend Siobhan Stagg, a beautiful Australian soprano. There was frustration, of course, but I also felt like I was failing. I had learned the part in a very short time, was so organised and then my body decided, 'No, it's not happening'. To step on stage but have no voice was so strange. I was sweating, the make-up was running and in between every stage appearance I had to lay on a bed that my dresser had set up in my dressing room.

Sabine Devieilhe appears on a new recording of Stravinsky's 'Le Rossignol' out on 14 Feb on Warner Classics

ANNA DABROWSKA, BRESCIA EAMISANO/TEATRO ALLA SCALA, TING RU LAI, PAUL SCALA, TATIANA MAZZOLA

'Like a father to me': baritone Roberto Servile

MyHero

Operatic tenor ***Iván Ayón-Rivas*** reveals the huge impact baritone ***Roberto Servile*** has had on his life and career

I have learned so much from studying with Roberto Servile. For one thing, he has worked with great opera conductors, including Herbert von Karajan, Lorenzo Viotti and others, and he has conveyed this wealth of experience to me. I have learned so much from him about the world of opera – not just the works themselves, but everything about thriving in this field.

Roberto worked me hard: in my first year of studying with him we would often keep going until 9 or 10 o'clock in the evening. He had studied under the great tenor Alfredo Kraus, and learned so much from him about the importance of breath, projection and intonation: and he generously passed all this on to me.

But this is the interesting thing about technique: for the first three or four months, Roberto simply studied my voice in detail, in order to find the best way for me to develop. Technique is so personal, so much down to the individual voice. You have to adapt the technique to your voice, not the other way round.

He taught me how to build a career, about the sacrifices you have to make to be an artist. He also taught me not to go after perfection – you will never reach the end of that quest! – but to give the best you can in each moment.

Last but not least, Roberto has been like a father to me. He was by my side in some of the most difficult moments in my life – when my mother got ill, when my father was having problems with his visa, he was there with me. He taught me to compartmentalise, to separate my work from the other aspects of my life.

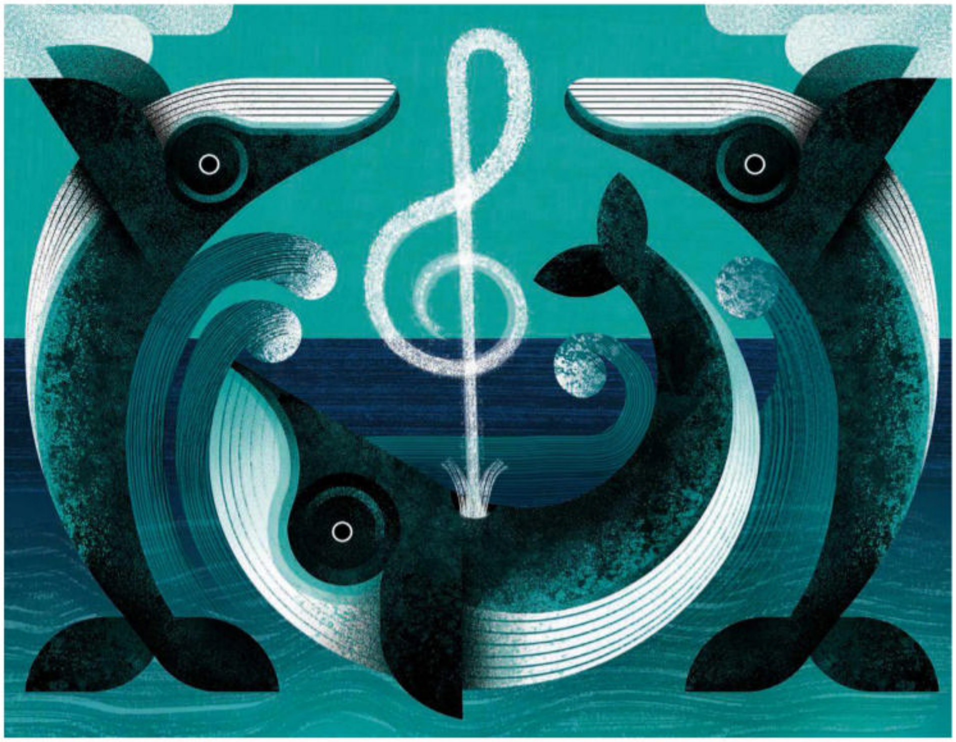
Opera Rara's recording of Verdi's 'Simon Boccanegra', featuring Iván Ayón-Rivas, will be released in late March.

THE LISTENING SERVICE

Having a whale of a time

Over a million years, male humpback whales have developed a repertoire of songs whose purpose scientists are now keen to establish, says **Tom Service**

ILLUSTRATION: MARIA CORTE MAIDAGAN



Männerchöre: the German tradition of male-voiced choirs in the 19th century that generated so much repertoire by Schubert, Mendelssohn, Brahms, Bruckner and all. Too little performed these days, these drinking songs and ripping yarns for male-voiced choruses are part of a long tradition of what happens when groups of blokes self-segregate and raise their voices about wine, women and song.

A remarkable analogy in the contemporary musical world for such expressions of *Männerchor*-style togetherness is to be found not in concert halls or sporting stadiums, but deep in our oceans. I'm not talking about Jules Verne-style assemblages of underwater singers burbling through their scuba gear. I mean male humpback whales, who get together at nodal points of their vast migration routes that gird the globe, meeting with one purpose: to sing.

The songs that humpback populations perform – and it's only the males who sing these extended songs, for reasons that researchers like Ellen Garland at the University of St Andrews speculate are to do with everything from mating rituals to socialisation to navigation – are an astounding bio-musical phenomenon. The songs span huge reaches of acoustic possibility, from high-pitched chirps and clicks to low-register moans. They can travel for dozens of miles through the ocean, and they can be performed in phrases that last from seconds up to half an hour.

What's most fantastic about Garland's research is that she has discovered that whole populations of male humpbacks share the same song, which they all learn, perform and repeat. That means that humpback whales have created a repertoire that they have probably been singing throughout their nearly million-year evolutionary history.

Male humpbacks share the same song, which they all learn, perform and repeat

And what is truly jaw-dropping is the mechanics of how their songs are shared and change. When an individual of one humpback population encounters a member of another, they might hear a new song and choose to incorporate elements into their own repertoire. The group decides on the shape of their new song at those get-togethers at key points of their global migrations.

In other words: male humpbacks are collectively composing and performing a precise yet ever-changing collection of songs. Are they continually trying to impress the females with performances of new repertoire? Are they competing with one another as individuals, or as whole communities to see whose song is the most powerful? Or are they simply singing for the sheer glory of being alive, and hearing the resonances of their songs in the unique acoustics of the open ocean? All of the above, very possibly, and for other reasons that cetacean science is still exploring.

The *Männerchor* tradition didn't go away – it just went deep underwater.

Tom Service plays the best music to start your weekend in *Saturday Morning* at 9am

FAREWELL TO…

Much-loved leader: Laura Samuel was a familiar presence at the BBC Scottish SO

Laura Samuel Born 1976 *Violinist*

Laura Samuel will be best remembered for two distinct phases in her career: firstly as a member of the Belcea Quartet, and then as leader of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. In both roles she became recognised as a violinist of exceptional versatility and character. Born in London, Samuel studied at the Royal College of Music where, alongside fellow students including violinist Corina Belcea, she co-founded the Belcea Quartet. She continued to play with the Belceas until 2010, during which time the group enjoyed huge success, not just on the concert stage but also with acclaimed recordings by composers including Beethoven, Schubert and Bartók. As leader of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra from 2012, she proved a popular and influential figure, occasionally enjoying the limelight as a soloist.

György Pauk Born 1936 *Violinist*

As long as it is distinguished, György Pauk's list of recordings includes Mozart quintets alongside the Takács Quartet and, from 1981, a Tippett Triple Concerto with violist Nobuko Imai, cellist Ralph Kirshbaum and the LSO under conductor Colin Davis that won major awards. It was, though, with the music of his fellow Hungarian Bartók that Pauk had a particular affinity, approaching the composer's music with a rare lyricism and grace. Born in Budapest, Pauk lost his father and mother at an early age, murdered by the Nazis and Hungarian fascists respectively. He studied at the Hungarian capital's Liszt Academy before fleeing the country in 1956, moving to Paris then eventually settling in London. There, he formed a close bond as a soloist with ensembles including the LSO (though not close enough to accept its offer to become leader), London Philharmonic and London Mozart Players, and performed at the BBC Proms on 15 occasions. Away from the orchestral stage, Pauk played in a renowned trio alongside Kirshbaum and pianist Peter Frankl, and was a professor at the Royal Academy of Music from 1987. Appropriately, it was back in the city of his birth that he gave his last ever concert, with the Budapest Festival Orchestra under Iván Fischer in 2007.

Also remembered…

Jan W Morthenson *(born 1940)* was an influential Swedish composer whose 'non-figurative' style of music aimed to avoid any connection with all traditional styles and techniques.

The Austrian **Hans Hammerschmid** *(born 1930)* achieved fame firstly as a jazz pianist and later as the composer of scores for German TV and films. He also arranged and conducted 'Merci chérie', Austria's winning entry in the 1966 Eurovision Song Contest.

GETTY

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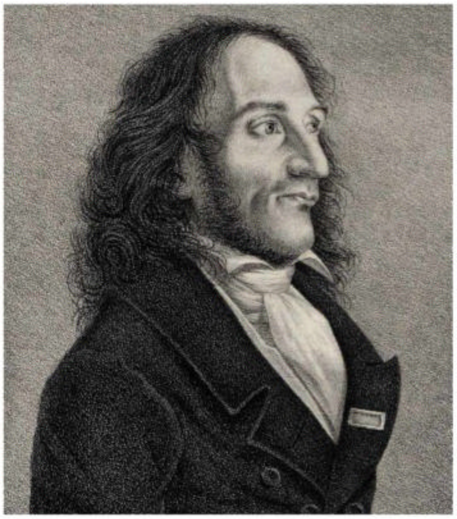
THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN

Pick a theme... and name your seven favourite examples

There's more to Paganini's Caprices than technical hurdles, says María Dueñas about her top choices

Hailing from Granada, the Spanish violinist María Dueñas shot to fame in 2021 when she won first prize and the audience prize at the Yehudi Menuhin Competition, aged 18. Since then, she has performed as a soloist with ensembles including the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra and Oslo Philharmonic, with BBC Radio 3 naming her a New Generation Artist from 2021-23. She has also signed to Deutsche Grammophon, and released her debut album in May 2023 featuring Beethoven's Violin Concerto. In February 2025, she releases Paganini's 24 Caprices, alongside works by Berlioz, Cervelló, Kreisler, Ortiz, Saint-Saëns, Sarasate and Wieniawski.



Caprice No. 2

My favourite caprices are those in which the melodic line and structure play an equally important role as virtuosity. The Second is a fine example of this. Although it has many technical hurdles, it also has a purity to it, almost like a prayer; in fact, it reminds me a bit of Bach. I came to it relatively late, when I was 18 or so, but for me it is one of the most emotionally charged caprices. I love the challenge of doing justice to its musical qualities.

Caprice No. 4

People tend to think of No. 24 as the 'special' caprice. But I think No. 4 is even richer in many aspects. For one thing, it is probably the most difficult from a technical point of view. But I also think it has more emotional depth. There's a sense of pain running through it, with many passages that start very, very quietly, giving you a sense that something is about to happen. Then there's this moment, in the middle part, when everything kind of explodes – both technically and in an emotional sense. It's very dramatic.

XENIE ZASETSKAYA, GETTY

Caprice No. 5

This is probably the caprice that I've played the most. I learned it when I was about 12 and have always felt that it was a good showcase for my very fast playing, and my *cantabile* style. But I also see it as an opportunity for experimentation. Over the years, for instance, I've played around with the ricochet bowing, finding different ways to combine it with other types of bowing. And I've found new ways to mark each change of colour or key, through my use of dynamics and breaks. It's all part of the fun challenge of keeping this piece fresh and alive.

Caprice No. 8

This is probably one of the least played caprices. It's very repetitive, so I think for many people it's hard to make something out of it. Plus, it has a lot of different characters, which are difficult to put together in a unified way. I've had to think a lot about how to structure it, but that very searching process has made this piece interesting to me: I enjoy the challenge of exaggerating the contrasts between moods and characters, while also finding ways of connecting them.

Caprice No. 11

This is probably the most touching caprice of all. The beginning goes straight to the heart, featuring all sorts of *bel canto* motifs. It's a very operatic style; I feel that we should actually sing it instead of playing it. But then you get to the middle part, which is totally different: very fast and rhythmical, full of nervous energy. As a violinist, you need to be able to switch quickly from one character to the other, but also to sing every note, even in the fast and virtuosic passages. This is a challenge, yes, but a good one.

Caprice No. 21

This caprice reminds me of a wise old person looking back over a long life, with a main theme that sounds elegant and serene at first, but then embraces all sorts of other characters. There are plenty of reminiscences of youth in the fast and virtuoso passages. And the opening is such a statement; I would actually begin a concert with this piece. It just goes to show how many kinds of emotions Paganini was able to cram into a single page, which is why this caprice is so fulfilling to me.

Caprice No. 24

I had to choose this one, right? I mean, it's the caprice of all time. Here, Paganini combines everything that we already had in the previous caprices: double stops, wild bowings, *cantabile* moments, sad moments, nostalgia and plenty of furious passages. It's a showcase for everything one can go through in a lifetime, showing just how much Paganini developed as a person over the four or five years it took him to reach this final caprice in the series. I love the way that it starts off very intimately, and then just keeps on gathering energy. The last few seconds are very, very crazy.

Interview by Hannah Nepilova

Music amid madness: María Dueñas finds the heart in Paganini; (opposite) the composer himself

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Richard Morrison

If you could travel to any year in musical history, which would it be?

Without getting too political – this is a family-friendly magazine, after all – I must confess that I am not terribly optimistic that 2025 will be a happy new year, especially for musicians. In fact, I fear it will be rather like a protracted visit to the dentist. It will be painful. We will undoubtedly come out of it poorer than we went in. And yet we will have to go through with it

At least, in real life we will. In our imaginations, however, we can time-travel. So, here's a question. If you could select any year out of the past 20 centuries to direct your personal Tardis towards, which would it be? A few rules first. Your decision should be based purely on musical considerations – not the quality of drinking-water in 16th-century Milan, or the likelihood of being slaughtered by a passing Viking in 9th-century East Anglia.

On the plus side, however, your Tardis has the ability to take you anywhere in the world in your chosen year. And it also gives you the power to enter any building where music is being made, even if it's to eavesdrop on JS Bach's famous meeting with Frederick the Great (1747, if that's your choice)

My initial thought was to plump for a year that contained the sort of epoch-defining premiere any music critic would love to have reviewed. For example, 1876, when the insufferable but undeniably talented Richard Wagner launched his own festival in a specially built theatre in Bayreuth to give the first staging of his complete *Ring* cycle. Or 1805, when the audience at the Theater an der Wien in Vienna emerged shocked, awed and probably dazed from a revolutionary event: the premiere of Beethoven's 'Eroica' Symphony. Or 1607, when (with all respect to that worthy but dull pioneer Jacopo Peri), the first great opera – Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* – was performed in Mantua, Italy.

Attending any of those events would have been extraordinary. And as a time-traveller from the future you would have the added benefit of hindsight (or would it be foresight?). So, you would understand the historical significance of what you were hearing.

But after attending the big premiere, wouldn't the rest of your chosen year be an anti-climax? Far better, it seems to me, to pick a year which had an array of fascinating musical events, rather than just one.

> You'd want to be in Leipzig for the first performance of Bach's *St Matthew Passion*

A year such as 1727, for instance. Of course, you would want to be in Leipzig in April 1727 for the first performance of Bach's *St Matthew Passion*, and in London the following October for the coronation of George II, graced by four splendid new anthems by Handel, including *Zadok the Priest*.

But you would also want to hop over to Venice to see one of the four new operas composed by Vivaldi that year (he didn't hang around), and perhaps to Dresden to hear some of the magnificent state music composed by the Bohemian composer Zelenka. And then you could nip to Paris to catch Daquin or Rameau playing their exquisitely ornamented keyboard music.

All tantalising stuff. But I think even 1727 is eclipsed by my ultimate choice. Which is (you probably guessed) 1913. What a belter of a year for music! Quite apart from the big event – the premiere of *The Rite of Spring*, when Stravinsky's score and Nijinsky's choreography triggered a riot – Paris also witnessed another sensation: a woman composer, Lili Boulanger, winning the coveted Prix de Rome for the first time in history, with a beautiful cantata, *Faust et Hélène*.

In that same year you could also travel to Russia for the first performance of Rachmaninov's *The Bells* and to see the enfant terrible, Sergei Prokofiev, pounding the ivories as soloist in his shocking new Second Piano Concerto. And in Vienna you could witness the premiere of Schoenberg's massive *Gurrelieder*.

More adventurously you could also cross the Atlantic and visit a detention centre for errant boys in New Orleans. There you would find a phenomenal 12-year-old kid playing the cornet in his first band. Thus did Louis Armstrong start his half-century career in a genre that was beginning to be called 'jazz'. 'It's a Futurist word which has just joined the language,' the *San Francisco Bulletin* helpfully explained to its readers in April 1913.

Across the musical spectrum, then, 1913 was truly an *annus mirabilis*. I would love to have been there. But perhaps you can suggest a year to top it for musical interest? If so, do write in. I'm all ears.

Richard Morrison is chief music critic and a columnist of The Times

Blue horizon

Star of the 2024 Last Night of the Proms, soprano Angel Blue has taken the opera world by storm on both sides of the Atlantic – it's a long way from local beauty pageants in California, as she tells Ashutosh Khandekar

PHOTOGRAPHY: JOHN MILLAR

'We're all a little bit in love now, aren't we?' Audiences around the world will certainly have responded to presenter Katie Derham's comment with a big thumbs up after Angel Blue's performance at the Last Night of the Proms in September. The American soprano spread her warm, open-hearted charm, with music ranging from Tosca's heart-rending 'Vissi d'arte' to spirituals newly arranged by pianist Stephen Hough and a playfully flirtatious zarzuela number, during which she flung roses into a delighted crowd. Blue's Proms debut had been hotly anticipated in 2022, but was cancelled following the death of Queen Elizabeth II. So, when she finally walked on stage last year sporting a blue jester's outfit with Union Jack ears, the cheers from Prommers were ecstatic.

Blue wasn't fazed by all the changes and cancellations of the 2020s. She takes a philosophical approach to disappointment. 'I'm convinced that everything will find its appropriate time, if you're open to it. And I hope I'm not arrogant in saying that I feel my time is today,' she says. Time was of the essence last year, which saw her becoming something of a fixture at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, appearing as Micaëla in *Carmen*, Magda in *La Rondine* and Liù in *Turandot*. She celebrated her 40th birthday in May and then appeared as Tosca at Covent Garden, followed by a solo recital 'Mumbai' with Zubin Mehta before heading back to London. The Proms appearance was the start of one of her busiest seasons to date, which will include her Met debut as Aida, her house debut at the Bavarian State Opera in Munich and her role debut as Verdi's Luisa Miller, with Washington Concert Opera.

It's a far cry from the High Desert of Southern California, where Blue started out in life. She grew up in Apple Valley, known for its sunny, rural charm and strong community spirit. The youngest of five children in a tight-knit family with three sisters – Arnetta, Felicia, Heather – and a brother, James, her childhood sounds idyllic. 'We lived in a beautiful house, and the centrepiece was a 1923 Steinway grand. My parents provided a stable, loving and inspirational household, built around music and faith.'

'My time is today': soprano Angel Blue, shot exclusively for *BBC Music Magazine* at the Royal Opera House, London

Dramatic muse: Blue as Margarita Xirgu in *Ainadamar* at the Met, 2024; (right) with Sakari Oramo at the Last Night of the Proms, 2024

MARK ALLAN/BBC, GETTY

Her father, Sylvester Blue, was a pastor and an accomplished gospel and country singer of some renown, travelling around the United States preaching and performing, often with his musical children in tow. Her mother Sylvia is an educator, violinist and keyboard player whose focus these days is her own charitable foundation, Sylviaskids, that provides scholarships to children from deprived backgrounds, enabling them to access higher education. This mix of innate performance pizzazz, deep Evangelical faith and a firm belief in the transforming power of education lies at the heart of everything Angel Blue stands for.

Although both parents exerted a huge influence, her father holds the key to understanding Blue through and through. 'One of the reasons I have my faith today is because my dad preached what he practised. He had a tough start in life: he was born out of wedlock, his mother didn't want him, his father didn't like him. He wasn't perfect, but he lived every day with so much hope and joy, and he passed that down to me.'

A passion for Puccini manifested itself very early on. As a child, Blue remembered her father singing along with every part in a recording of *Madama Butterfly*. And when she was just four years old, her parents took her to a concert performance of *Turandot* which changed her life. 'I loved everything about it, from the moment the brass blazed out… I was crying, I had goose bumps! Then a lady came on and started singing. I said, "Dad I want to be like the woman in the light." He whispered back, "You can absolutely be like her…" And then turning to my mom he said, "Sylvia, we might have a musician on our hands!"'

Sylvester, who had been classically trained as a singer at the Cleveland Institute of Music, set about teaching his daughter, focusing on good technique from the outset. Breathing came first: 'There was a cupboard next to the piano and my dad would push the door shut with just his stomach. He would put my hands on his ribcage so that I could feel his ribs expanding out like an accordion. That's how as a child I learned about the way the diaphragm works. He would always say, "A singer finds his voice by using his voice – and if anything doesn't feel right, don't do it – no matter who's telling you!"'

Her teenage years at the prestigious Los Angeles County High School for the Arts paved the way for an undergraduate degree in piano and voice at Redlands University in California, and then on to a masters in opera at UCLA. So far, there had been a logical progression towards a career in music, but then Blue's life took a curious twist. 'I wanted to go on to higher education, but the family finances had been pretty depleted after my three older sisters had been put through college. As it happened, in my last couple of years at high school I had shot up in height, so that by the time I was 18, I was five foot eleven and a half. My mom said, "Why don't you enter a few beauty pageants? The prize money can be pretty good, you know." To be honest, I was appalled – my first reaction was that as an aspiring opera singer, beauty pageants were beneath me. However, I got over my snootiness and I did end up applying, and I loved it!'

She was, unsurprisingly, a huge success as a beauty queen, combining looks, poise, talent and a winning personality. She was crowned Miss Apple Valley and Miss Hollywood, and went on to be first runner-up in the Miss Nevada and Miss California pageants. As her star turn, she would sing a snippet of Violetta's 'Sempre libera' from *La traviata*. Blue's winnings helped her fund her education, but the whole culture of pageantry also gave her a chance to think about herself and how she was perceived by the rest of the world. 'I think it helped me inhabit the person I am more fully, and be comfortable with my place in the universe. In a pageant, the petite woman standing next to me might be five foot two, but why make comparisons? We

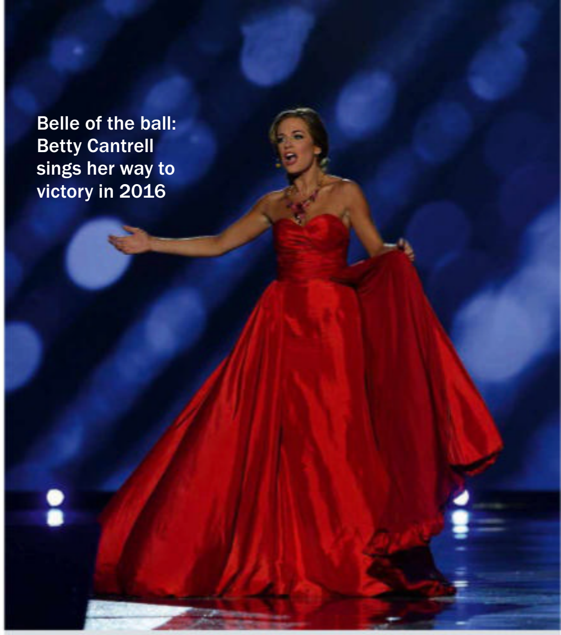
‘Taking part in pageants helped me to inhabit the person I am more fully’

are who we are, with all our differences, and that’s something to celebrate.’

Life had been a relatively smooth ride for Blue so far, but then, at the end of her time at UCLA, it hit a bump. ‘I had to make some big decisions about my future. Suddenly I found myself as runner-up rather than the winner in pageants, and that just wasn’t good enough for me. At the same time, I was struggling to get myself on to a young artist programme. All my peers at college seemed to find places on opera training programmes all over the world – at the Met, in Germany and in Britain. And I was stuck in Fresno, California, at yet another beauty pageant. Then, at the end of 2006, on New Year’s Eve, my dad died. He was just 66, and I was devastated.’

Blue coped with her grief by heeding her late father’s advice: ‘Dad’s mantra was always, “Don’t give up: you’ll win if you don’t quit.” Bad things happen to us all, and you have to recognise and acknowledge them. But if you have faith and just keep going, there can be salvation.’

Salvation came in the form of none other than Plácido Domingo, who at the time was head of Los Angeles Opera’s Young Artist Program. ‘I went to sing to Maestro Domingo and he said, “Ok, I really like your voice and you have a great personality. I’m going to give you a chance.” Domingo remains, of course, a controversial and complicated figure these days, following allegations of sexual harassment from several women,



Belle of the ball: Betty Cantrell sings her way to victory in 2016

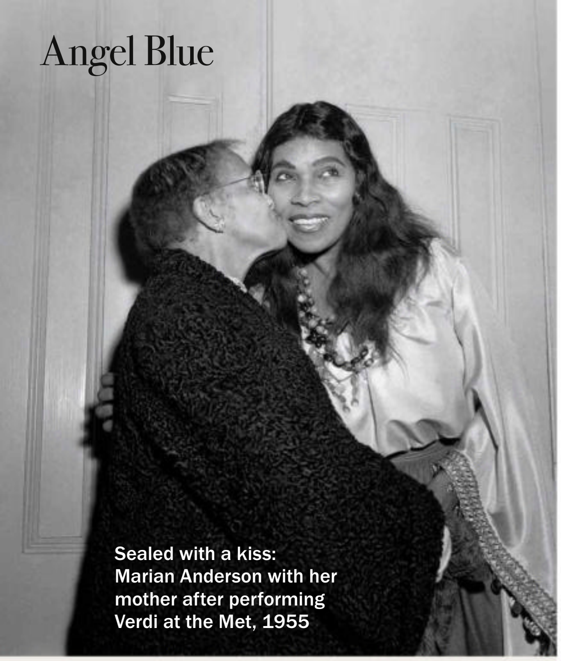
Aiming to impress

Top pageant performances

Angel Blue is not the only beauty pageant veteran to offer musical performance as her ‘talent’ – that opportunity for contestants to showcase their artistic skills. While everything from performing a monologue to speed painting, hair dressing and ventriloquism have featured over the years, playing an instrument and singing are always popular choices.

Most vocal performances are, of course, more *American Idol* than the Met. But in 2016, Miss America Betty Cantrell from Georgia wowed the crowd with her dramatic and accomplished rendition of ‘Tu? tu? piccolo iddio!’ from Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*. And Grace Stanke (left) from Wisconsin won the coveted 2023 title after playing Vivaldi on her violin.

Then there was Kansas National Guardsman Theresa Vail, who in a 2012 qualifying competition for Miss Kansas took the unusual decision to sing ‘Nessun Dorma’ from Puccini’s *Turandot* with just two days’ notice. The unfortunate Vail had been informed that her chosen talent of archery was unacceptable, as Miss America’s insurance policy has a ‘no projectiles’ clause. ‘I’d never sung opera in my life,’ said Vail. ‘I had an appreciation for it, and I sang soprano in choir back in high school, but I hadn’t sung since then and certainly never opera.’ Amazingly, watching YouTube videos of the aria did the trick and Vail was duly crowned Miss Kansas in 2013. But despite hiring a vocal coach to compete at national level, the 2014 Miss America crown proved elusive.



Sealed with a kiss: Marian Anderson with her mother after performing Verdi at the Met, 1955

Race to the top

Black operatic divas

Segregation and bigotry presented serious barriers to an operatic career in America for black singers during the 20th century. Angel Blue acknowledges that her own path to success has been made easier by a succession of trailblazing women.

Contralto **Marian Anderson** led the way when she became the first black opera singer to perform at the Met 70 years ago, on 7 January 1955, in Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*. Anderson had earlier stepped into a political storm when the Daughters of the American Revolution barred her from singing in Washington DC. The incident led to the famous Easter concert in 1939, when Anderson performed on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial to a mixed-race audience of around 75,000, broadcast to millions around the nation.

Anderson's defiance inspired a young generation of exceptionally talented black singers to rise to the top of their profession. **Leontyne Price** had to fight to sing roles that defied racial stereotypes, becoming one the great Verdi sopranos of her day and the first black singer to appear regularly at The Met. **Grace Bumbry**, meanwhile, broke the 'Bayreuth barrier' when in 1961 she became the first black musician to perform on Wagner's hallowed stage, singing the role of Venus in *Tannhäuser* (pictured above). **Jessye Norman** continued the fight as a vocal Civil Rights activist alongside a stellar career that brought a regal dignity to the stage.

JOHN MILLAR, GETTY

A major influence: (top to bottom) Angel Blue with her mentor Plácido Domingo at a UNESCO event in Paris, 2012; with Eric Owens in *Porgy and Bess* at the Met, 2019; Blue and her husband, computer programmer Adam Mielke, at the *Porgy* premiere

which shattered his reputation at the end of a distinguished 60-year career. Blue stands by the man who continues to be her mentor. 'People can think what they like about him, but my opinion is not changing. I have a huge amount of respect for him, and I care so much for the fact that he even bothered to listen to me sing.

'I believe our steps in life are ordered, and that my father handed the baton of my care to Maestro Domingo. It was he who insisted I should go to Europe rather than stay in the US for further training. So, in 2009, when I was just 25, I found myself heading to Budapest for the Operalia competition. The experience was incredible. Europe changed everything for me. I saw that opera wasn't something apart from society. It was part of a long cultural tradition, with deep social roots.'

> 'Bad things happen to us all. But if you have faith and just keep going, there can be salvation'

Blue won the Zarzuela round of Operalia and was placed second in the overall competition. From then on, she found opportunities to spread her artistic wings. 'In Europe, opera houses didn't see me as a "black" soprano, and I could explore new roles.' Added to Clara in *Porgy and Bess* and Puccini's Tosca and Mimì that had become her mainstay in the US were roles such as Giulietta in Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffmann* in Vienna and Marguerite in Gounod's *Faust* at Paris Opera. Verdi followed, with Violetta in *La traviata* and Leonora in *Il trovatore*. In 2023 she made an impressive role debut as Aida at the Royal Opera House, which she sings at the Met for the first time this January.

While Europe exerts a strong pull on Blue's career, she is constantly being reeled back to the other side of the Atlantic by matters of the heart. In 2016 she married Adam Mielke, a San Francisco-based

Honorary Brit: Blue on the balcony of the Royal Opera House

computer programmer who came into her life with a four-year-old son. 'I can't pretend that balancing life as a wife and stepmother with a busy opera career isn't hard,' she says. 'I love my family and I hate being away from them. But the support I get from my husband and my son is unquestioning, and I'm so grateful for that.'

Meanwhile, recent challenges have included the role of Margarita Xirgu in Osvaldo Golijov's opera *Ainadamar*, which ran at the Met at the end of 2024. The work charts the life of the poet-playwright Federico García Lorca through the memories of his muse, Xirgu. There's no better example of how comfortable Blue is in her skin than the video she posted on social media showing her pre-performance warm-up. With hair tied back and her face free of make-up, dressed in unflatteringly figure-hugging grey Lycra, she sweats her way through a series of demanding physical exercises.

It's a gritty reminder of the reality behind all the glamorous paraphernalia of the classic operatic diva, as well as an example of the fearless honesty that immediately connects Blue with her public. 'This show has helped me to remember that our bodies are also our instruments,' she says. There's no subtext. Her emotions are worn on her sleeve. Tears frequently well up in her eyes during any conversation – but they are likely to be tears of joy. 'Joy is my middle name,' she reminds me. 'It's what everything is about.'

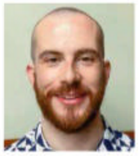
Beyond the opera house, Blue has developed a career as a presenter on television and radio, working for BBC programmes such as the Proms, Cardiff Singer of the World and *Songs of Praise*. Britain has been an important staging post throughout her career, and her debut at the Proms last year seemed to capture something of today's zeitgeist in the UK's music scene. Introducing his final Last Night as Proms director, David Pickard said, 'We've tried to tap into the feeling that the boundaries of music are slightly breaking down… We don't put things in silos in the way that we used to.' If any artist epitomises this spirit of openness, joy and playfulness, it's Angel Blue.

The Last Night of the Proms featuring Angel Blue is available to watch on BBC iPlayer

> ‘Change happens slowly. Kids see me on a poster and know it’s possible for someone like them to do a job like mine’

THE BBC MUSIC MAGAZINE INTERVIEW

Anthony McGill



As New York Philharmonic principal clarinettist, Anthony McGill is the orchestra’s only black permanent player. He speaks to **Tom Stewart** about making a lasting difference

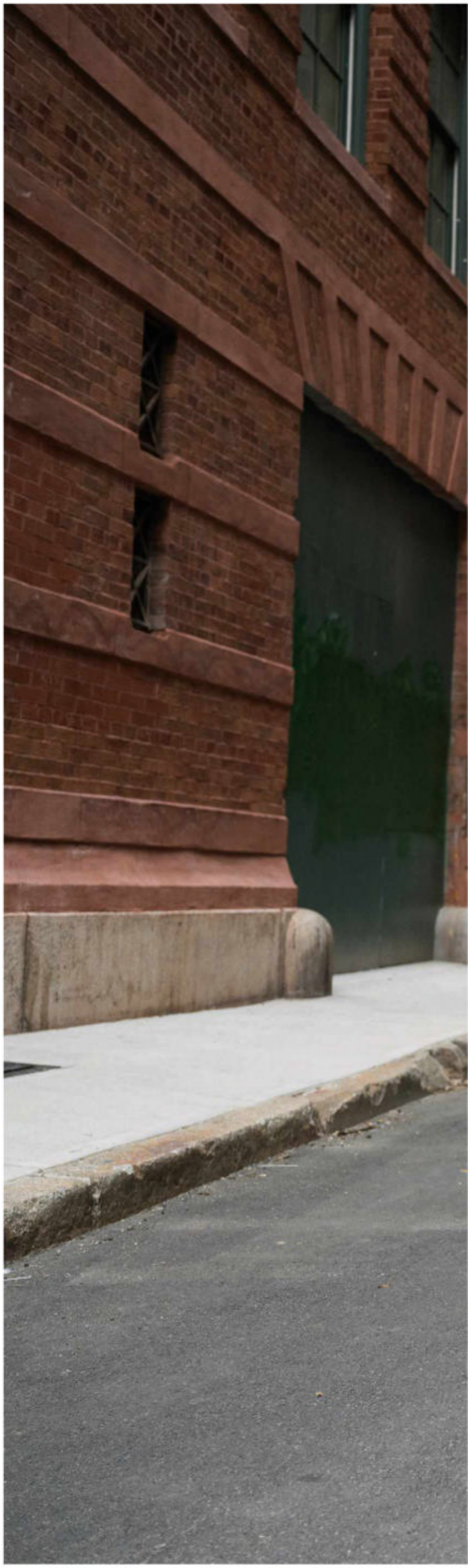
PHOTOGRAPHY: MARTIN ROMERO

In late 2008, Anthony McGill was the 29-year-old principal clarinettist of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. An invitation came to perform at Barack Obama’s presidential inauguration and soon he was there, on the steps of the Capitol Building alongside Yo-Yo Ma, Itzhak Perlman and Gabriela Montero. It was probably the greatest experience of his life, he says. ‘I just remember that feeling of hope. Growing up as a black kid in Chicago, my parents had told me and my brother that we could be whoever we wanted to be, but none of us imagined that one day we would have a black president.’

If this memory now feels like a dream, he explains, it’s because of everything that has happened in that same spot since. Twelve years after that bright January day, an attempted insurrection struck at the heart of American democracy. ‘It makes you question everything,’ McGill says, his eyes widening. ‘Will there always be that threat of violence? It can be so disheartening, but you have to keep looking at all the good people, how they come together. The pendulum always swings to a better place.’

McGill, now 45, is now principal of the New York Philharmonic, a position he has held for just over a decade. Thanks to his international solo and chamber music career – and with an Avery Fisher Prize and Grammy Award nomination under his belt – he is one of the orchestra’s highest profile players, as well as an educator and outspoken advocate for racial justice. We meet on a sunny afternoon in September at a cafe close to the orchestra’s home at Lincoln Center. Soon after, of course, the pendulum will swing decisively back.

He has not long returned from the UK and his debut at the BBC Proms. ‘I’d never set foot in the Royal Albert Hall before. It felt like the Super Bowl,’ he says, joking that the resulting adrenalin meant his performance of the Mozart Clarinet Concerto, with the BBC Scottish



NO STANDING
Anytime

Symphony, was his fastest ever. 'You've got this mosh pit at the front, and after you're done, they take you off to be interviewed on TV, like you're on ESPN after the big game. I couldn't believe how insane it was.'

The Proms was a highlight of a big British year for McGill that has also included a performance at London's Barbican Centre, where he's had a year-long residency, of *You Have the Right to Remain Silent*, a clarinet concerto by US composer Anthony Davis. Davis, whose opera *X: the life and times of Malcolm X* was performed at the Metropolitan Opera in 2023, writes music that engages directly with themes of racial justice. The concerto, which has McGill playing a tiny E flat and huge contrabass clarinet in addition to his standard instrument, requires the orchestra to recite the warning given by US police when they arrest a suspect.

'Anthony Davis's music is amazing because it brings different communities together to think about things they've never thought about before,' says McGill. Police brutality is an unusual subject for a clarinet concerto, but the piece is successful, he explains, because of the composer's operatic vision. 'It really gives life to you as a performer. You're talking about the state of the world, its problems and their solutions.' Does the sound of the clarinet, often compared to that of a human voice, help here? 'Perhaps more than with any other instrument, you can do so much to change the sound and keep things authentic at the same time. It can be bright, it can be dark, it can be fuzzy, it can be clear, it can be delicate, it can be wild.'

'I didn't have much confidence as a kid. I was quiet, nerdy and not quite accepted'

McGill was born in 1979 to artists Ira and Demarre and grew up in Chatham, on Chicago's South Side. 'My parents were educators, but they never forced music on us,' McGill says. 'They used to go to parties and jam sessions in the '60s and my mom bought my dad a flute.' It lay gathering dust until, one day, McGill's older brother, also Demarre, picked it up. 'It was like magic; he got the bug right away.' Inspired, McGill took up the clarinet aged eight and quickly fell in love with it too. Demarre is now principal flautist of the Seattle Symphony; the pair perform alongside oboist Titus Underwood and bassoonist Bryan Young and will soon release a recording of James Lee III's *Principal Brothers.*

For the young Anthony McGill, who studied with Chicago Symphony Orchestra principal Larry Combs, music was both a point of difference from his peers and an escape into another world. 'I didn't have much confidence when I was a kid. I was super quiet and nerdy and not quite accepted among my normal friends,' he says, chuckling. 'Yeah, let's just say that – not quite accepted.' His mother was alarmed one day when he came home from school with a torn jacket. 'There was some stuff going on that wasn't cool or safe, so she got me out of there.' His parents remortgaged their house to send him to Interlochen Arts Academy, a prestigious boarding school, from where he won a place at the Curtis Institute of Music.

A decade after he joined the New York Philharmonic, McGill remains its only permanent black member. In a city where a quarter of people have African American heritage, this seems a million miles from how things ought to be. McGill is sanguine. 'Change happens slowly,' he says, adding that his unique position feels like a privilege. 'I have a responsibility to those kids who come to see us play and see a face like theirs onstage. Kids from around the country tell me they know who

Making it right: (left) Anthony McGill performs as soloist with the New York Philharmonic; (opposite) as a young clarinettist at the Merit School of Music in Chicago; (inset) US composer Anthony Davis

I am because their teacher has my picture up in their band room. They've seen me on a poster and know that it's possible for someone like them to do a job like mine.' He hopes that by employing more substitute musicians 'who just happen to be black', the orchestra is giving more people a chance to join its permanent ranks. 'We have to find the most talented musicians and bring them into the fold.'

In 2016 McGill received a John Jay Justice Award from The City University of New York in recognition of his work as an advocate for social equality. The other winners were feminist activist Gloria Steinem and lawyer Bryan Stevenson, founder of the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), which gives free legal representation to people who have been denied a free trial or may have been wrongly convicted of a crime. McGill describes Stevenson, whose story was the subject of 2019 film *Just Mercy* starring Michael B Jordan, Jamie Foxx and Brie Larson, as 'one of the greatest speakers alive today'.

The two quickly hit it off and soon McGill was on a flight to Montgomery, Alabama, where Stevenson has established a museum and a memorial to the victims of lynching. 'It was my own personal pilgrimage,' says McGill. 'I had never been more moved, educated, heartbroken or inspired in my life. You barely learn about these things in school. In South Africa they've had the whole Truth and Reconciliation process to help come to terms with Apartheid, but we haven't done anything like that in America. That's why we're still dealing with the same issues today as we were 50 or 100 years ago.'

Montgomery has a special place in the history of America's civil rights movement. As well as its former position at the heart of the transatlantic slave trade, it was in Montgomery that Rosa Parks was arrested in 1955 for refusing to give up her seat on the bus to a white woman. The bus boycott that followed was a flashpoint in the struggle for equality. 'It's one of the hottest places on earth and these old ladies were walking to work, day after day,' explains McGill. 'Bryan wants more people to understand these things. He presents them without blame; it's about educating people so we can come forward together.'

McGill has been working with the EJI to bring groups of people from across the classical music industry to Stevenson's Legacy Museum in Montgomery. 'No amount of time spent doing diversity training on a computer is going to change hearts and minds if people don't understand how society got to where it is today or why we need to see more black faces in our orchestras,' McGill says. 'The reason classical music is so white is because it's been controlled by the people in society with money and power. When you couple that with blatant racism, of course lots of folks are excluded.'

A decade after his performance on Capitol Hill, McGill posted a video of himself playing a minor-key version of 'America the Beautiful' and kneeling in a gesture of protest at the killing of George Floyd. At the time, he told National Public Radio that artists have a responsibility 'to express what's wrong so we can help make it right'. With the EJI he wants to encourage people to make decisions for the good of society. 'Dealing with the past is a big part of moving forwards. Through truth you can find space for hope.' Hope, perhaps, that the pendulum goes on swinging.

MARTIN ROMERO, GETTY, MICHELE ZOUSMER, BRANDON PATOC IMAGES

Passing it on: McGill wants to 'change the face of classical music'

Education is power

Anthony McGill's Juilliard work

Key to McGill's early education was the Merit School of Music, which offered Saturday classes free of charge to talented young musicians in Chicago. 'From there the rest is history,' he says. At Merit, McGill studied with David Tuttle, who introduced him to Larry Pauls, then principal clarinettist of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. 'The school also gave me a scholarship for summer camp at the Interlochen Center for the Arts, which is where my brother and I first fell in love with a community of musicians. It's one of the reasons we're musicians today.'

Today McGill is artistic director of the Juilliard School's Music Advancement Program that does the same for students aged 8-17 in New York. 'Our mission is to change the face of classical music,' he says. 'We have a super diverse bunch of kids and we're trying to give them the opportunities they deserve, helping the next generation of New Yorkers.'

Like the UK, the US has seen cuts to music education programmes for young people. 'It means that those neighbourhoods that don't have big tax revenues don't have the money to fund their programmes. There are hugely dedicated teachers, but they need more resources. I had lots of opportunities growing up, but it was all thanks to people who dedicate their lives to that work. Supporting those people today is a very difficult task but one that's desperately needed.'

Analysing Amadeus

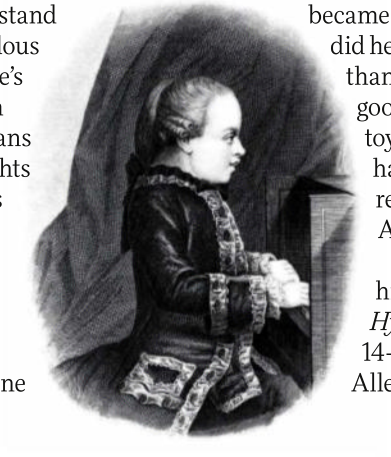
Using today's psychoanalytic methods, what can we learn, asks Rebecca Franks, about the mind of Mozart, perhaps the greatest musical genius of all?

When it comes to Mozart, there's the music, the man… and the mystery. We're not talking about the many myths that sprang up after his untimely death, but instead the tantalising mysteries of Mozart's creative mind. Was he born a genius, or did he become one? How did he manage to compose over 600 pieces, many of which are outstanding in quality, in his 35 short years? And why did someone who could compose the masterful counterpoint of, say, the 'Jupiter' Symphony and capture the subtle nuance of human emotion in operas such as *The Marriage of Figaro* also write letters full of toilet humour and a six-voice canon titled *Leck Mich Im Arsch* (obvious even without translation)?

With every year, decade and century that take us chronologically further away from Mozart's lifetime, our appetite to understand the mortal behind the miraculous music only appears to grow. He's been prodded and poked from afar, by everyone from historians and musicologists to playwrights and novelists, to psychologists and psychiatrists. That's only possible because we have his letters and eyewitness accounts of his life, and the exercise is made far more appealing because Mozart is one of those composers, like Janáček or Berlioz, who writes vividly. His letters bear repeat reading and interpretation. And with every generation that seeks the secrets of Mozart's mind, a mirror is inevitably held up not just to his era but to the present day: perhaps what we see in Mozart is a reflection of our own current preoccupations.

Even in his own lifetime, there was a sense Mozart sat outside the 'norm'. His musical genius was obvious. He began playing the keyboard at four, after hearing his older sister Nannerl, who was also a great talent, and also taught himself the organ and violin. One of the first times he tried writing using an inkwell, it was to compose his first clavier concerto. Maths was a craze for a while – Nannerl recalled him turning the walls into 'slates', and that he 'talked of nothing, thought of nothing but figures' – but music became his main obsession. 'No sooner did he begin to devote himself to music than his taste for all other pursuits as good as died, and even games and toys, if they were to interest him, had to be accompanied by music,' recalled a family friend, Johann Andreas Schachtner.

At 11, Mozart composed his first opera, *Apollo et Hyacinthus*. The account of a 14-year-old Mozart writing down Allegri's *Miserere* after hearing it



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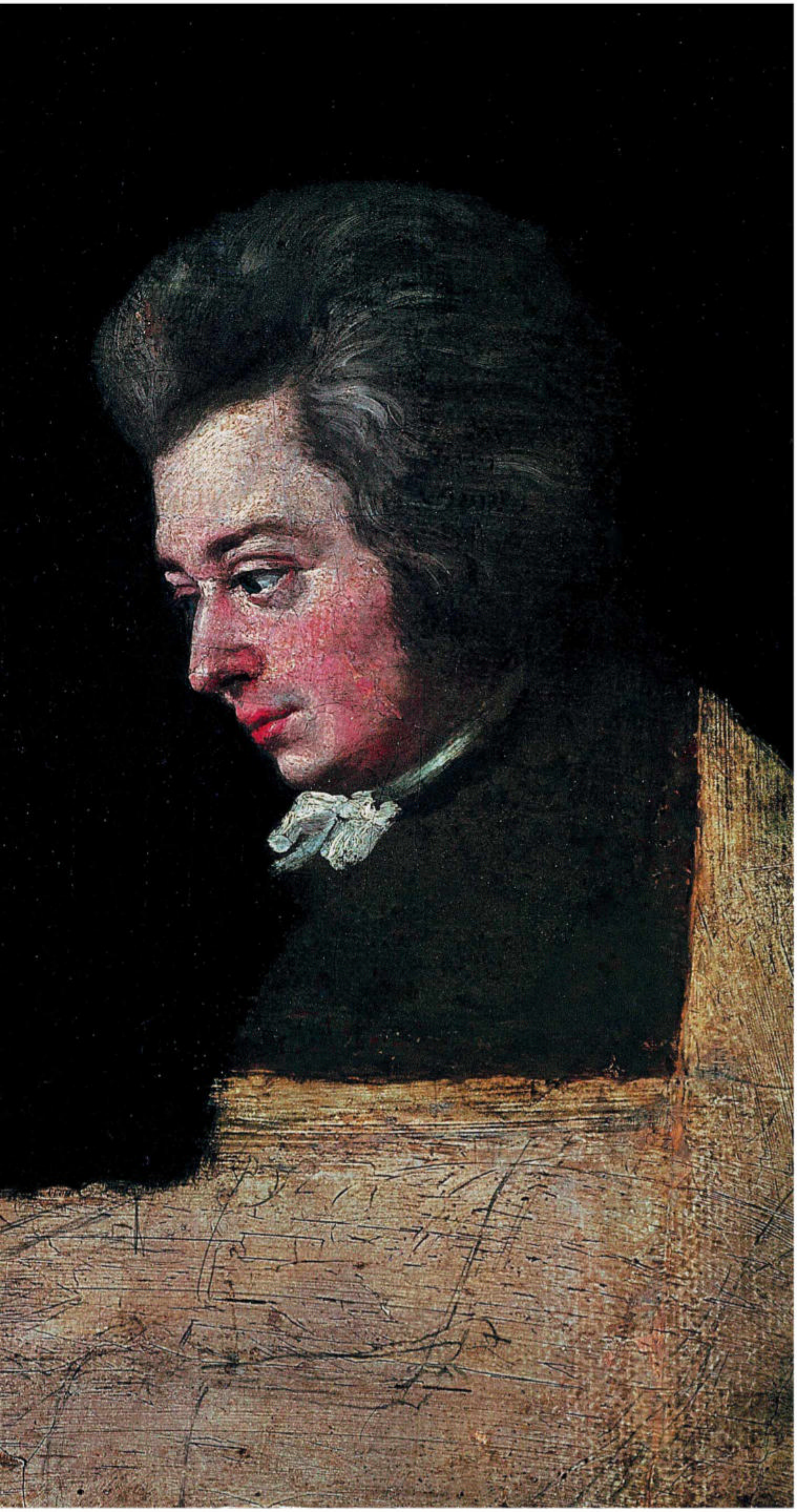

Source of fascination: an unfinished portrait of Mozart by his brother-in-law, Joseph Lange; (opposite) the young composer at the keyboard alongside sister Nannerl (hidden)

once at the Sistine Chapel is legendary, and whatever the truth, it is certain he had an acute ear and a quick memory.

Perhaps more remarkable, suggests psychologist Andrew Steptoe in his essay 'Mozart's Personality and Creativity', is that Mozart successfully transitioned from being a child prodigy into an outstanding composer as an adult. That meant renegotiating his relationship with his domineering father Leopold, who had brilliantly masterminded and managed the young Wolfgang's musical education and career. Mozart worshipped Leopold: 'Right after God comes Papa.' And yet he wanted to break free and carve out his own career, which he did when he went to Vienna in the 1780s, even if, at first, he lacked the practical organisational skills necessary to succeed. Indeed, financial difficulties plagued his life, and even when he did rake in good money, he lived a lifestyle beyond his means, whether that was spending on his expensive wardrobe or gambling at card and billiard tables.

> 'As soon as people lose confidence in me, I lose confidence in myself,' wrote Mozart

Unlike the misanthropic Beethoven, Mozart was a sociable creature. He had a lively spirit, always wanting to charm and please people. Yet his character was far more complex than that suggests. His letters reveal him also to be unpredictable, acerbic, arrogant, good-humoured. He could also swing into melancholy, listlessness and loneliness. Mozart was in no doubt of his own talent, yet as an adult wrote, 'As soon as people lose confidence in me, I lose confidence in myself.' He often swung between extremes of mood, but his humour was a constant thread throughout his life. He loved to make fun of his friends, and to play with words. His love of scatological humour seems outrageous to us nowadays, but in 18th-century Salzburg it was commonplace – his mother, in particular, relished rude jokes as much as he did.

So, what are we to make of Mozart's character and creative mind? Over the past hundred years, thanks to the advent of modern psychology and a greater understanding of mental health, various theories have been suggested. You might hear alarm bells here, as the idea of 'diagnosis ▶

Evidence of genius: (right) works such as *The Marriage of Figaro*, performed here at Glyndebourne, reveal Mozart's rare mastery of emotions; (below right) his father Leopold

at a distance' is fraught, and it's a professional no-no when it comes to living public figures – psychiatrists only offer diagnoses of people they've assessed in person. 'When someone is dead I think it's different,' Simon Wessely, former president of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, told *The Guardian* in 2016, adding that the most interesting studies don't seek to find unknowable answers – 'We don't want to descend into silly arguments about what Mozart died of' – but to look beyond that, using today's knowledge to enrich our understanding of the past.

When it comes to Mozart, those questions are numerous. Some have, inevitably, been silly, some more interesting. A whole industry has sprung up around him. Arguably, its roots stretch right back to Mozart's childhood. When Leopold took an eight-year-old Mozart and Nannerl to perform in London, the pair were advertised as 'prodigies of nature'. Daines Barrington, a lawyer, magistrate, amateur scientist and a fellow of the Royal Society (which later published his *Account of a Very Remarkable Young Musician*), was sceptical, and decided to put his talents to a quasi-scientific test. Visiting the Mozart's family lodgings, Barrington put the prodigy through his musical paces, including asking him to sightread a newly composed piece and improvise operatic arias about love and rage. Mozart was the real deal, it transpired.

Quantifying Mozart's genius was also the goal of American psychologist Catherine Cox, who published *The Early Mental Traits of Three Hundred Geniuses* in 1926. She employed historiometry, which uses statistical methods to study dead geniuses and human creativity – a practice that has its sceptics. Drawing on letters and accounts, Cox estimated Mozart's IQ at between 150 and 155 – high enough, today, to qualify him for Mensa. (Mendelssohn and Beethoven were smart enough too; Haydn fell short at around 120-130.) Whether that tells us anything illuminating is up for debate.

In more recent decades, attention has turned increasingly to Mozart's behaviour and personality. In the 1980s, the Australian doctor Peter Davies put forward a new idea: that Mozart had, as they were called then, 'manic-depressive tendencies' and a cyclothymic disorder (which the NHS now describes as a mild form of bipolar disorder). Davies found evidence for Mozart's elevated mood, relating it to his 'decreased need for sleep, excessive energy, inflated self-esteem, increased productivity, sharpened and unusually creative thinking, extreme gregariousness, physical hyperactivity, inappropriate joking and punning, and indulgence in frivolous behaviour without appreciation of its painful consequences'. One example of Mozart's irrepressible nature is this gem of a letter to his father in November 1777: 'I can't write anything sensible today, as I am rails off the quite… I help it cannot. Warefell. I gish you nood-wight. Sound sleeply.'

If Mozart's sarcastic humour, flamboyant behaviour, excited speech disturbance and constant fidgeting are among the clues Davies picks on for the manic side of his mood swings, the flat periods of his life, his melancholy, his lethargy, feelings of worthlessness and anxiety hint at the depressive aspects. In this reading, his character and creativity go hand in hand – and many have heard that in the juxtaposition of the great beauty and sorrow expressed in his music (see 'Between the notes', left).

Some of those behaviours have been interpreted differently in the 21st century, thanks to the rapid advances in understanding neurodiversity. Rather than simply labelling Mozart, this offers different lenses through which to understand him. A 2012 Channel 4 documentary explored the suggestion that Mozart had Tourette's Syndrome. It is a cluster of symptoms, the presenter James McConnel, a composer who himself had Tourette's, explained

Character study: pianist Robert Levin

Between the notes

Mozart's musical persona

Mozart's letters put his character into words, but what can his music itself tell us about his personality? For that, it's perhaps best to ask those who perform it.

For many, it boils down to his grasp of the human condition: its rich complexity and absurdity. Pianist Artur Schnabel's quip that the solo piano music was 'too easy for children, too difficult for adults', fits with our image of Mozart's character: one second, a serious composer, the next a playful child.

Dualities are another theme. 'Mozart is a mixture of humanity and divinity,' pianist Imogen Cooper once told *BBC Music*. 'It's sort of god-like but it's completely human in that there's every emotion. There's wit, humour, naughtiness, grief.'

'Mozart is constantly, restlessly changing the music's character in the most unpredictable way,' explains pianist and musicologist Robert Levin in the *Sunday Times*. 'Suddenly he goes from the jocular to the sentimental, or from the sensuous to joking to being nostalgic, melancholic or ardent.'

For the late conductor Neville Marriner, the essence of Mozart can be distilled thus: '[He is] the composer who ultimately provides the most sophisticated human emotional experience of all.'

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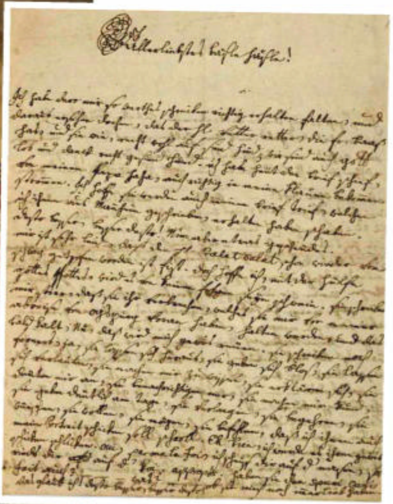
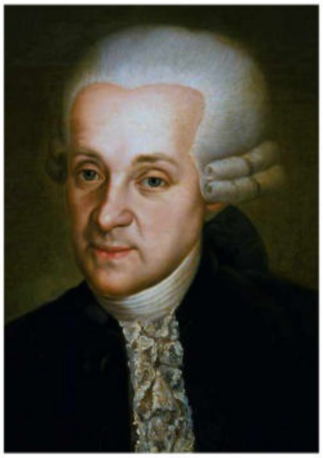


Scatalogical script: (left) Mozart's letters tended to get straight to the bottom of things…



> Leopold Mozart brilliantly masterminded and managed the young Wolfgang's musical education and career

in *The Guardian*, with 'physical twitches, vocal twitches, obsessive-compulsive disorder and attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD)'. Mozart, he notes, was obsessed with clocks, cats, shoe sizes and his wife's safety. He twitched, grimaced, and tapped his feet.

More recently, researchers have suggested Mozart may have had ADHD or autism. Comparing the historical record to the symptoms of these neurodevelopmental conditions is interesting. They might explain, for instance, his extreme sensitivity to sound. Right back in 1766, Professor Samuel Tissot, who studied child prodigies and their nervous systems, wrote of Mozart that 'wrong, harsh, or excessively loud sounds bring tears to his eyes'. His observation of Mozart's extreme sensitivity to sound is backed up by others; Mozart couldn't stand shrill trumpets, for instance. Today, it's known that, for instance, hypersensitivity to sound is common in autism.

Ulrich Müller-Sedgwick, a consultant psychiatrist for adult neurodevelopmental pathways and a music-lover, believes Mozart does display aspects of neurodivergence, although he is quick to caveat that it's important to remember historical context. 'In the travel letters, there's some inattention [which is an aspect of ADHD], but then he was also living a special form of life that's very different from children today who have to sit in a classroom,' he says. He spots other signs, however. 'There's this element, which I see a lot in ADHD patients, of rebelling against authorities,' he gives as one example – Mozart was (to his relief) sacked by the archbishop in Salzburg, for instance. 'People with ADHD are independent minded – they don't necessarily follow the rules.'

For Müller-Sedgwick, the truly interesting aspect isn't necessarily a diagnosis, but to ask how our current knowledge of neurodiversity can 'help us understand better aspects of the creativity of these incredibly creative and productive composers'. So, for instance, Mozart had a seemingly bottomless well of musical ideas, so much so that he left more than 150 unfinished manuscripts. He also wrote across the whole range of genres: symphonies, operas, sonatas, string quartets, masses, songs, concert arias, string quintets… the list goes on.

'There's this theory that people with ADHD have reduced levels of dopamine or noradrenaline,' explains Müller-Sedgwick. 'Dopamine is the "reward" neurotransmitter, so anything that promises a reward would activate dopamine, while noradrenaline is activated by novelty.' Creating a new composition offers both novelty and reward, he explains. And for all that distractibility, Mozart also had the ability to focus intensely under pressure or when the subject truly interested him. He wrote his last three symphonies in just six weeks, for instance. 'This flow or hyper-focus mode is a well-documented phenomenon.'

Was it thanks to ADHD Mozart could write so prolifically? Should we look to history or to psychology to explain his humour and his compositional ability? And do we yet have an answer for the eternally fascinating question: what was it that made Mozart a genius? Even if our answers are constantly evolving, a quote written in Mozart's *Stammbuch* (friendship book) by his friend Gottfried von Jacquin in 1787 always holds weight: 'True genius without heart is a thing of naught – for not great understanding alone, not imagination alone, nor both together, make genius – Love! Love! Love! That is the soul of genius.'

Musical formula

Anecdotally, the scientific mind is often drawn to music says Naomi Yandell, who approaches six eminent scholars for their thoughts on its attraction

Take a seat in any serious amateur orchestra or chamber group, and it is quite likely that your neighbouring musician will be a scientist of some kind. Doctors seem to be particularly motivated in this regard, and a search on Google will reveal many an orchestra led and organised by medics. And at a more elevated level still, some of the greatest scientists of their era have also found themselves drawn to the world of quavers and barlines. 'If I were not a physicist, I would probably be a musician,' wrote Albert Einstein. 'I often think in music. I live my daydreams in music. I see my life in terms of music.'

But why this connection between two apparently disparate disciplines, of art and science? To get the answer, I asked six leading scientists whose own lives happen to embrace both. There may in fact be more in common between the two than first appears to be the case, says Michael Thorne, professor of maths (algebra) and former vice-chancellor of Anglia Ruskin University, and also a conductor. 'Mathematics is largely about looking at patterns, pattern recognition and deciding what to do based on that information,' he explains, 'so there are similarities to reading and understanding music.' Of course, each brain is unique, with its individual set of responses and reactions coloured by genetic make-up and the environment in which it is nurtured, but even in the small sample of scientists polled for this article, certain themes emerge.

While most of my interviewees grew up with classical music around them, Edgar Choueiri, professor of applied physics and aerospace engineering at Princeton University, was born in Tripoli, Lebanon, and did not hear his first classical concert until he was 11 years old. 'I'll never forget it,' he recalls. 'They played Telemann, then Bach. My jaw dropped. I was seduced by the quality of the sound of the violins and couldn't believe humans could make anything that beautiful.' Julian Close, formerly an applied physicist (transducers and sensors) at the National Physical Laboratory but now an international opera bass, also experiences a visceral reaction: 'It gives a thrilling sensation as you listen. It can make your hair stand on end, the sheer drama of it.' And Deborah Prentice, professor of social psychology and vice-chancellor of the University of Cambridge, finds music equally and instinctively immersive: 'Playing the piano is completely absorbing. I am in the moment. Music is in time. It is right now. That is incredibly compelling.'

> 'I always felt like a scientist, and music gave me a way of bringing out emotions'

But more than providing a creative outlet for scientists occupied with rational thought, music is actually complementary to scientific work, suggests Tom Heightman, a fellow of the Royal Society of Chemistry and chief R&D officer of Adrestia Therapeutics. 'There is something spiritual and emotional about music that can't be captured in words,' he says. 'It is a wonderful counterbalance on a personal

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The keys to discovery: music can prove beneficial to scientists on various levels, as is explained by leading researchers (below, clockwise from top left) Deborah Prentice, Tom Heightman, Martin Landray and Julian Close

level.' Martin Landray, professor of medicine and epidemiology at the University of Oxford, feels similarly: 'Growing up, I always felt like a scientist (disciplined, methodical, deterministic), and music gave me a way of bringing out emotions and feeling the joy of rhythm and dance. I prefer Romantic music; clever, mathematical music doesn't give me what I need from music.' Heightman likens entering the 'amazing and fascinating' world of music with going 'through the wardrobe' just as the children do when they discover the land of Narnia in CS Lewis's *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe.*

Thorne points out the subtle connections and parallels between the scientific and musical worlds that entice him specifically as a scientist. 'I find that music takes me into a completely new world,' he says. 'It gives me relaxation and delight in a different part of my intellect. There are structural messages that you have to hunt for in music, as in science, and that appeals to me.'

'Some music is very structured,' agrees Heightman. 'When I think of the ascending motifs in Bach's First Cello Suite, it is reminiscent of the very ordered atomic structure of the double helix of DNA and the sequence of bases that tell the story of our genetics. There's a direct parallel there. It's like a benevolent cycle of inspiration between the two. Both hold a mysterious allure of exploration, of experimentation and continuous learning. There are always new discoveries to make and build into the way we think.'

Music's special ability to balance and complement scientific thought can also boost scientists' thinking and problem-solving skills. 'This is very much the case,' says Heightman. 'Very often on a project, we spend days with our heads in books or poring over data on the screen but we won't achieve the necessary insight. It's when we step away and allow the sub-conscious mind to wander that the connections get made – in an unstructured way. Then the "eureka" moment suddenly pops out. I think that is the most profound impact that recreational music has on my work. Having the recreational counterbalance allows the freedom of thought.'

Prentice agrees. 'I'm a social psychologist, so I'm interested in human and group behaviour. Music for me can be like an experimental model. Producing music involves behaviour, so it is a model of how mind, body and action fit together. And then it is also a model of groups and how they function. I'll very often think, "What am I trying to create with this group? Is this group like a symphony orchestra where they are going to get together and produce a collective sound? Or is it more like a string quartet where they are going to play at the same time but you will hear each individual voice?"'

Landray, who leads large-scale clinical trials to find new medical treatments, finds analogies to his experiments in the workings of an orchestra: 'It is the conductor's job to pull the very best from each individual and/or their sections to create the overall performance.' 'Drug discovery requires teams of scientists with a wide range of different expertise,' adds Heightman. 'Creatvity is most powerful at interfaces, when we make the boundaries between disciplines fluid – just like musicians playing different instruments challenge each other to push their boundaries of tone and expression.'

'Scientists can learn from the way musicians practise too,' suggests Landray. 'Practice demands a level of discipline and can be lonely, hard work. Tricky bars need to be worked at over and over. The same is true for science. You sometimes come across a little nugget of the project that is hard. You think there is a way through it, but have to be able to solve it before you can expand out to the whole picture.'

Mathematical beat: Michael Thorne conducts Saffron Opera Group in Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*

Quantifying whether music can make a real impact on scientific research is difficult. But detecting whether music can alter the course of a scientist's working life is much more tangible. 'My love of music changed my scientific career,' shares Choueiri. 'I was trained as a plasma physicist and my funded work was in this area. I now work on plasma propulsion for spacecraft for half my time, partly funded by NASA. The other half is spent researching spatial audio, driven by my love of music!

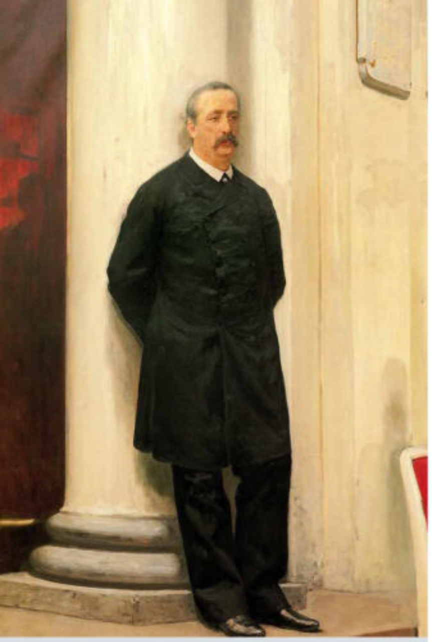
> 'Half of my time is spent researching spatial audio, driven by my love of music!'

'It all started because I asked myself why it was that when I played back my recordings at home it didn't sound like a real orchestra. Of course, I wasn't the first person to worry about this. After banging my head against the three most promising exploratory techniques in use at that time I chose to focus on one of them. It had a fundamental flaw that altered the tonal colour of the music – what we call "tonal distortion". As an engineer and a scientist, I started to look into it and as a lover of music my dream was to perfect it so that I could reproduce the piece that started me on my quest: Bach's Mass in B minor.'

That quest, explains Choueiri, was a hugely successful one: 'Eventually I had a mathematical breakthrough. That has taken my scientific work in a completely different direction. The university decided to patent my invention: Bacch 3D Sound, in honour of JS Bach – also an acronym (Band Assemble Crosstalk Cancellation Heirarchy). It has been a great commercial success and is used in high-end stereo systems.'

Close's life also took a dramatic turn through music. After singing as an amateur five evenings a week while still working at the National Physical Laboratory, he decided to leave and enrol instead at music college. He is now an international opera singer, appearing frequently at the New York Met. 'One summer, as an amateur, I sang a small role in *La traviata* and after it I felt bereft,' he recalls. 'I had been a level-headed scientist where everything is very conformed and regimented but now some emotions were unleashed. It is well documented that certain pitches literally resonate with the heart, body and mind and to generate them oneself is quite incredible. "Primal" is the word. At music college, physics was a bit of an impediment to my music making. I'd be focusing on the science of it all and drifted into micromanaging.'

The perils of overthinking resonate with Prentice's experience of learning the opening of Beethoven's 'Waldstein' Sonata too. 'My teacher said, "Don't force your hands together; just play, then fix it if it is off. There are things in life that you try to programme to be right and there are the things that you let go. That's hugely important to me in my role at Cambridge. You can't make Cambridge do anything. It's already behaving. It is in action. It is doing. That idea of synchronising behaviour is something that I have thought about and used many times. Music is a set of ideas, concepts and activities – it is so many things; it's my vocabulary.'



Doubly able: the brilliant Borodin

Chemistry and chords

Alexander Borodin

While many figures have shown a flair for both science and music, surely no-one in history can claim to have matched Russian composer and chemist Alexander Borodin when it comes to being an acclaimed master of both.

Best known in scientific circles for his work on aldehydes, in 1862 Borodin followed post-doctoral studies in Heidelberg and Pisa with the appointment as chemistry professor at the Medical-Surgical Academy in Saint Petersburg, the city in which he also founded the School of Medicine for Women. His research as a chemist was influential both in his own time and beyond, his name later being handed down to posterity in a method called the Hunsdiecker-Borodin reaction.

And then there were his activities as a musician, partly as one of the 'Mighty Handful' group of Russian composers. In this capacity, masterpieces such as *In the Steppes of Central Asia*, *Prince Igor* and three fine symphonies flowed from his pen, as he mixed voices and instruments in the concert hall with the same expertise that he combined benzyl chloride with potassium bifluoride in the laboratory.

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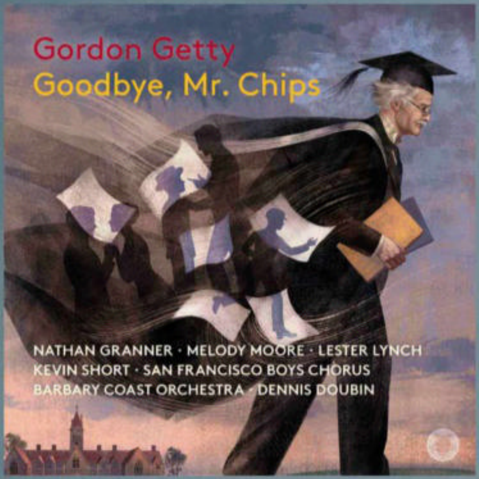
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When music bites

Stephen Johnson explores satire in music, revealing how composers have used their craft to comment on the social and political worlds in which they live

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How old is musical satire? It's impossible to say. We know about the Roman poet Juvenal's *Satires* because they were written down and dutifully preserved by later generations. But it wasn't until the later Middle Ages that anything like precise written notation began to define itself, and that was largely for church music, a medium with traditionally a low tolerance for mockery. It's hard to believe that the more free-spirited kinds of performer didn't indulge in a bit of parody or caricature from time to time, but if so, it went unrecorded – probably for good reason.

One problem with musical satire is that, even when bolstered by words, music can be very slippery when it comes to spelling out ideas, events or persons. American MAGA zealots roar out Bruce Springsteen's *Born in the USA*, oblivious to the fact that Springsteen meant it as a send-up of the leaders who capitalise on blind patriotism – or maybe they do know and just don't care. And opera audiences delight in Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*, despite its barbed depiction of the politics and egoistic absurdities of the opera world, in which, as Theodor Adorno tartly put it, 'the bourgeois temporarily rediscovers his lost humanity'. If Strauss did want to prick consciences, perhaps his biggest mistake was to make the final duet for Ariadne and Bacchus so voluptuously beautiful.

So, when does satire in music begin to take off? I'm ruling out JS Bach's 'Coffee' Cantata (a swipe at the effects of coffee addiction) and Mozart's 'A Musical Joke' (target: incompetent musicians, and perhaps the rising romantic craze for 'popular' art) on the grounds that both, however well crafted, are pretty leaden affairs, the latter worlds away from the wit and delicious humour of Mozart's da Ponte operas. It was with Beethoven that the notion that music could, of itself, convey ideas began to acquire momentum – political ideas very much included. But satire doesn't seem to have been on his agenda, unless one counts what sounds like a disaffected retake on the Ninth Symphony's 'Ode to Joy' in the last two movements of the Op. 132 String Quartet: a *Bruderschaft* ('comeradely') march is shoved out of the way by an agitated recitative, to make way for the tragic theme Beethoven once planned for the Ninth's finale.

Political satire, in the sense of using exaggeration, irony or distortion to 'critique' something or someone, does begin to pick up after Beethoven. Robert Schumann uses the folk song 'Grandfather's Dance' to mock bourgeois philistinism as he depicts his own 'Brotherhood of David' marching against the enemies of Art in his piano cycle *Carnaval* – but would you be able to guess that without a heavy programme-note prompt? It is in opera, where music has

Drink till you drop: in *La traviata*, Verdi takes a swipe at Parisian hedonism through the character of Violetta, played here by Anna Netrebko, 2005; (opposite) Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos* mocks operatic society itself

Industrial hell: Wotan (Hanno Müller-Brachmann) and Loge (Stephan Ruegamer) descend into Alberich's grim kingdom in Wagner's *Das Rheingold*; (below) Edith Sitwell, a voice of 1920s melancholy

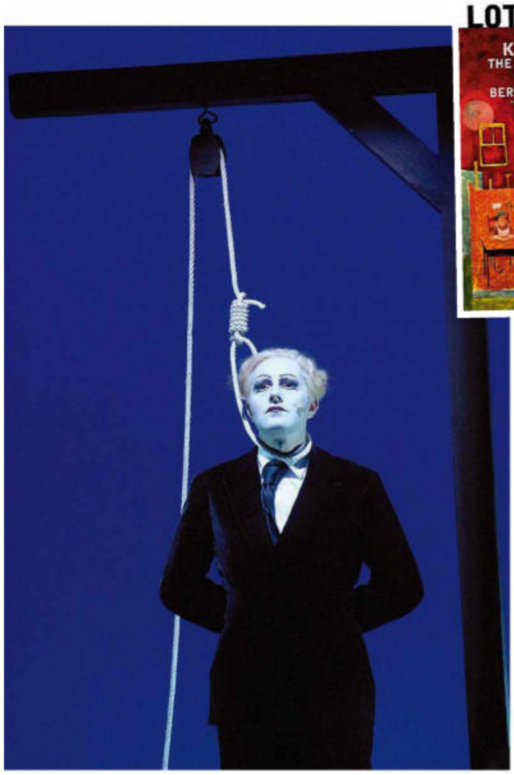
strong back up from libretto, stage scenery and action, where the more serious kind of satire really begins to bite. The parodistic element in the florid, hyped-up vitality of Violetta's 'Sempre libera' ('Forever free') in Verdi's *La traviata* may not be obvious when it's sampled alone as a catchy virtuoso aria, but in context it's clearly a half-mocking, half-compassionate depiction of empty, escapist hedonism.

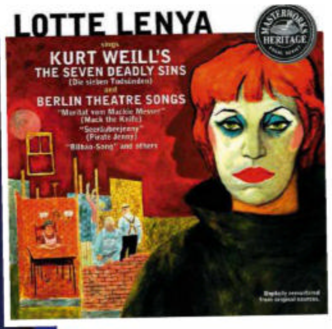
More controversially, Wagner makes the dwarf Alberich the embodiment of capitalist greed and destructiveness in *Das Rheingold*, the first instalment of his *Ring* cycle. In order to gain power and wealth, Alberich must first forswear love. The problematic element is that Alberich could be interpreted – and has been – as an anti-Semitic caricature. But what part does the music itself play in that interpretation? The answer seems to be none at all. But who can forget the sound of the massed anvils, pounding out robotic rhythms, emerging from menacing bass brass, as Wotan and Loge descend deep underground to Alberich's dark satanic mills? As a parody of dehumanising industrial mass production, it's bang on target.

Still more chilling today is the final scene of Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* of 1873, in its familiar revised version. Unaware that Tsar Boris is already dead, the people welcome the new pretender to the throne, believing him to be Boris's brother Dmitri, previously presumed murdered by Boris. The behaviour of the mob is depicted with terrible acuity. We see them initially taunting a half-dead aristocrat, then swelling in massed elation as 'Dmitri' arrives and bids them follow him to Moscow. But then we see a lonely, figure, the Simpleton. He sees it all – the people place their hopes in a new leader, but he will turn out as bad as the old one: 'Weep, weep, Russian people'. Sounds familiar? Mussorgsky mocks the people's gullibility, lampoons their impulse to 'righteous' violence, but in the end, it is compassion that holds the stage.

But these are broad, generalised targets, and (with the partial exception of the Mussorgsky) they lack the comedic element and sheer zest of their composers' Parisian contemporary Jacques Offenbach. Generally speaking, when Offenbach takes aim at specific things or persons – like Paris Opera supremo Giacomo Meyerbeer and his brand of Grand Opera – there's an element of affection, a twinkle in the eye. Thus Offenbach's mocking of Napoleon III and his court in a number of his operettas did nothing to dissuade the Emperor from awarding him the Légion d'honneur, the highest of all French honours. And he could taunt the Parisians themselves and still make them applaud wildly. For comparison,

There's also a melancholic element in Walton's *Façade*, a sense of the hollowness at the heart of things





Sticking the knife in: Lotte Lenya's famous 1956 recording of Brecht and Weill's *The Seven Deadly Sins*; (left) Stefan Kurt as Mack The Knife in *The Threepenny Opera*, 2007

think of Gilbert and Sullivan in *HMS Pinafore*, sending up Anglo Saxon self-importance in 'For he is an Englishman', but not enough to make their audiences squirm in their seats.

It's in the 20th century that Offenbach's wit and comic zest begins to fuse with Mussorgsky, Wagner and Verdi's socio-political indignation. It was more or less inevitable that when two such combative, Zeitgeist-aware young left-wingers as Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht got together, satire of the most biting kind would be part of the mix. Mention Brecht-Weill and immediately *The Threepenny Opera* springs centre-stage. But there's a problem here, not in the mordant, catchy music, but in the clarity of the message. Emphasise the low-life, sleazy milieu (18th-century Soho and its criminal classes) and you miss the point – Brecht and Weill wanted to show the decadent Weimar bourgeoisie an image of itself, stripped of the mask of respectability. But how many productions make that clear? It's easy to come out not entirely sure as to what the intended political target is.

More effective as satire – and musically even more impressive – is the Brecht-Weill 'sung ballet' *The Seven Deadly Sins*, composed just after Weill fled Germany in 1933. In it, the 'split' heroine Anna (played by both a singer and a dancer) is judged with sanctimonious cruelty by her family, sung by a four-voice all-male chorus. The music skewers their pompous self-deception brilliantly, but the satire is arguably all the more telling because it's balanced by genuine pathos. The more we feel for Anna, the harder it is not to hate the rigid, ridiculous conventional piety that condemns her.

It was during that turbulent, anxious period between the two world wars that political satire in music really came into its own. At first sight, Walton's scandal-courting *Façade*, for reciter (declaiming sense-defying verse by Edith Sitwell through a megaphone) and six instruments, seems at least partly a tribute to the hedonistic, convention-defying 'bright young things' of the early 1920s, who seemed so determined to put the horror of war, and the memory of the patrician Old Order it destroyed, behind them. Old-World values are gleefully lampooned, but there's a melancholic element too, a sense of the hollowness at the heart of things. Sitwell herself knew that emptiness personally – it would later drive her into the arms of the church – and Walton clearly sensed it too.

Over in Paris, birthplace and enduring home of 'radical chic', the 1920s and '30s saw a veritable efflorescence of partly iconoclastic, partly self-reflexive musical satire. Neo-Classicism, the new aesthetic kid on the block, in itself contains elements of satire (lets knock those irritating 'masters' off their plinths). Francis Poulenc's plotless ballet *Les Biches* ('The Darlings') is a half-entranced, half-biting portrayal of the *jeunesse dorée* (the fashionable, wealthy young) – very entertaining, but it leaves one wondering where all this rootless, directionless partying can end (and of course we know, now).

But with a lot of this stuff it's hard to resist the impression of self-congratulation. ('Aren't we clever – we can even view *ourselves* ironically!') Far more devastating, despite its composer's denial that there was any element of parody, is Ravel's *La Valse*, begun just after World War One and set in a Habsburg Vienna where glory was just beginning to turn to decay. The gorgeous, glittering orchestral colours – Gustav Klimt in music – turn increasingly sinister as the Old World waltzes to its doom. Did Ravel sense, when he wrote *La Valse*, that the final stage of the catastrophe was still to come? With hindsight, it's hard not to feel that he did.

As the old order finally collapsed, something began to define itself that made aristocratic and bourgeois values seem almost innocent in comparison – totalitarianism. Understandably, Stravinsky and Schoenberg waited until

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Prime target: Michael Redgrave as Macheath in Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, 1940

Chorus of disapproval

Four satirical operas

Gay The Beggar's Opera

This 1728 work took aim both at the fad in London for Italian *opera seria* – *The Beggar's Opera* mirrors its format exactly, but sets the action amid the criminal underworld – and also, in the character of Macheath, at prime minister Robert Walpole.

Barton The Disappointment

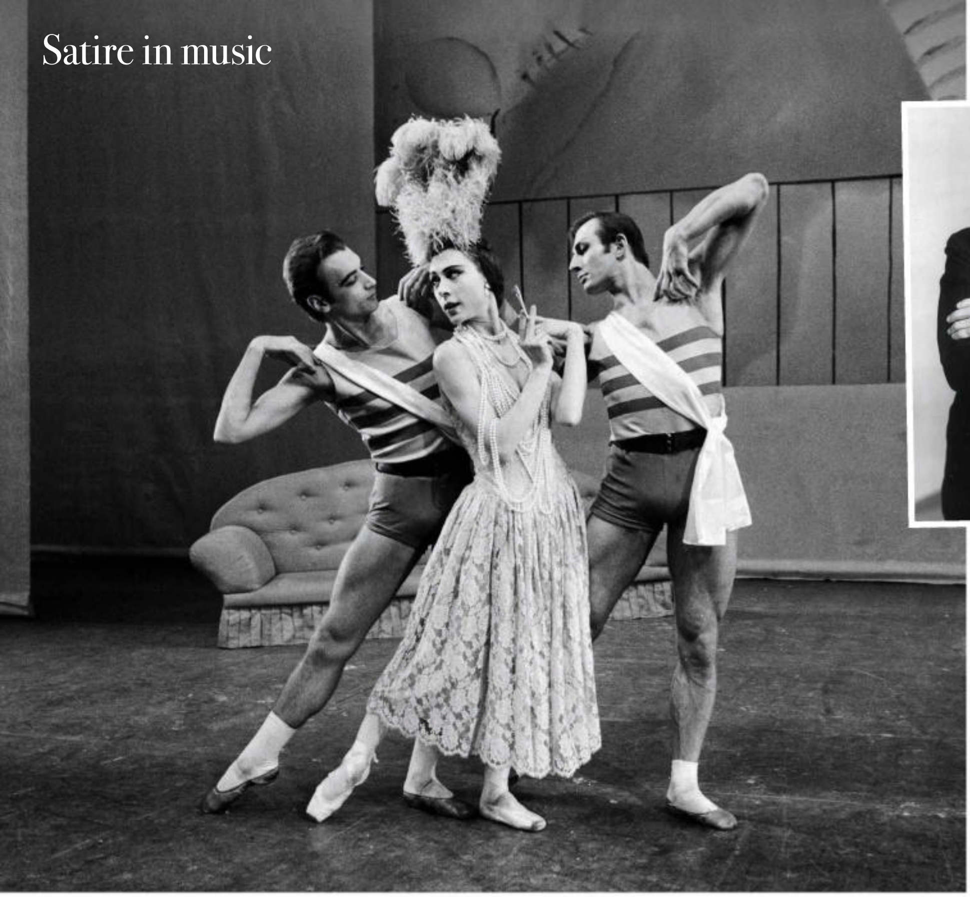
Andrew Barton's 1767 'ballad opera' was set to be the US's first home-grown opera until its premiere in Philadelphia was cancelled at the last minute. Its cleverly delivered jibes at the rule of Britain's George III may well have had something to do with that…

Gilbert and Sullivan Iolanthe

The political class is also made fun of in this 1882 operetta by the very masters of Victorian-era musical satire – the House of Lords, in particular, is portrayed as a chamber full of halfwits who sit in government solely by privilege of birth.

Janáček
The Excursions of Mr Brouček

Janáček did not hold back about the philistine bourgeoisie that the title character of his 1920 opera represented: 'I want us to be disgusted with such people, to stamp on them and strangle them when we meet them.' When, however, Brouček makes an imaginary journey to the Moon, the composer makes a simlarly pointed dig at the arty, precious types he encounters there.



Current affairs: (left) Poulenc's *Les Biches*, performed at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, 1964; Stravinsky (left) and Schoenberg (below) both aimed shots at Hitler and Nazi Germany

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they were safely in the US before turning their satirical scorn on Adolf Hitler and his robotic devotees. Schoenberg's *Ode to Napoleon Bonaparte* (1942) takes a blistering diatribe by Byron and redirects it at the man who, under the cover of ideology, was in the process of destroying Europe. This fusion of mock-Romantic heroism with vicious caricature, culminating in a half-logical, half-wildly improbable chord of E flat major (straight from Beethoven's 'Eroica') is one of Schoenberg's most approachable and genuinely uplifting late works.

The Stravinsky is more surprising. 'Composers combine notes. That is all,' he wrote in the programme note for his Symphony in Three Movements (1942-5), and then went on to demonstrate that he didn't believe that at all. The harsh, strutting march that begins the finale is, Stravinsky said bluntly, 'a musical reaction to the newsreels and documentaries that I had seen of goose-stepping soldiers. The square march-beat, the brass-band instrumentation, the grotesque *crescendo* on the tuba – these are all related to those repellent pictures'. Not since the *Rite of Spring* had he penned anything so elementally violent, only this time there's a clear contemporary target.

But satirising totalitarianism from the other side of an ocean is relatively easy. The prize for breathtaking courage – at times bordering on foolhardiness – must surely go to Shostakovich. Being on the receiving end of an official denunciation for his *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* (see p14), right in the middle of the period known in Russia as 'Stalin's Terror', should have deterred him for life – even though Stalin's Soviet Union is not specifically an object of mockery in the opera. But then, after the USSR's 'Historic Victory' in World War II, to stoke up expectations of a Soviet Ninth Symphony to rival Beethoven's, only to then deliver a cheeky, edgy skit of a classical symphony, with a pompous militaristic trombone-plus-drums combo repeatedly deflated by breezy piccolo... What was he thinking of? You can almost hear the moustache. This time the barb really did go home, and Shostakovich faced terrifying public humiliation three years later.

With its fusion of mock-Romantic heroism with vicious caricature, *Ode to Napoleon Bonaparte* is one of Schoenberg's most genuinely uplifting late works

And yet that mischievous streak kept resurfacing throughout Shostakovich's career. There it is at the very end in his song cycle *Four Verses of Captain Lebyadkin*, in which Dostoyevsky's scurrilous poet, an opportunist who attaches himself to a 'cause' for dubious reasons, could have stood for a fair number of Shostakovich's contemporaries. Or there's the uproarious-desperate 'Humour' movement from the 13th Symphony, 'Babi Yar', in which – as for many Russians at the time – jokes are seen as a means to defy totalitarian control.

Shostakovich apart, however, how often does musical satire actually cause disquiet to its intended victim? It may be a valuable release for its audience, but is it ever much more than that? Might it even undermine itself by allowing its hearers to congratulate themselves on getting the point? I'll leave you with a thought-provoking little comment from Shostakovich's compatriot Prokofiev, a master of biting musical irony, from the programme note to *Sarcasms*, his own work for solo piano written in 1912-14: 'We often indulge in malicious laughter at someone or something, but when we pause to look we see how pitiful and sad is the object of our ridicule; and then we grow ashamed, the mocking laughter rings in our ears, but it is we who are its object now.'

From 28 December to 1 February, Chris Addison will be presenting 'Satire and the Stave', a new six-part series exploring how composers from Vivaldi to Ethel Smyth and Julius Eastman found ways to critique or play with various ideas in their music.

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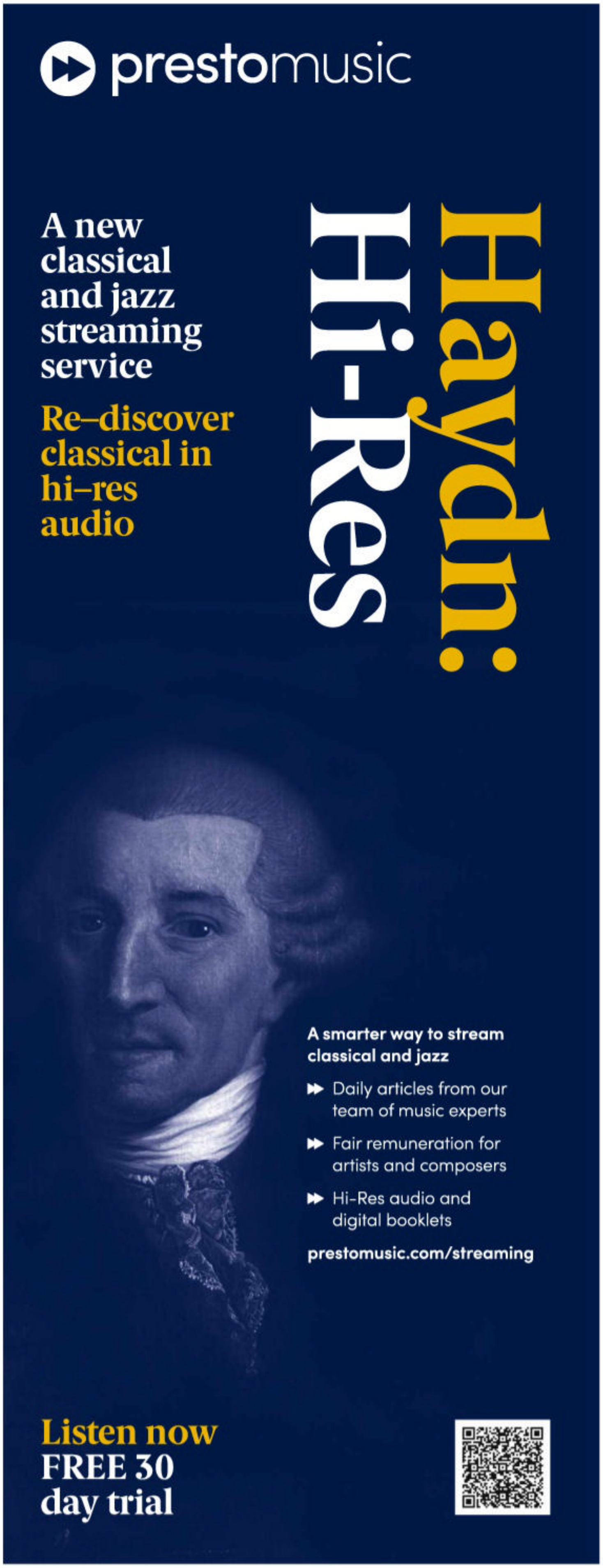
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A life on the stage: Dame Patricia Routledge is a veteran of musicals and operetta; (opposite) with Clive Swift in television's *Keeping Up Appearances*, 1992

Beyond Hyacinth

Though known chiefly for her brilliant portrayal of a social climber on TV's *Keeping Up Appearances*, Patricia Routledge was once also a successful mezzo, as the actress recalls with Michael White

In her most celebrated TV character, the desperate, delusional but indefatigable social climber Hyacinth *Boo-kay* (as she insisted on pronouncing the name Bucket), Dame Patricia Routledge played a woman anxious to be thought of as a music lover (though she couldn't tell her Chopin from her Mendelssohn) and given to burst decorously into song (albeit off the note).

'That bit was difficult,' she says now of the dodgy pitch. And it was difficult because Patricia Routledge wasn't just a star of small-screen comedy. For much of her career, before the TV beckoned, she'd been seriously involved in music as a mezzo-cum-contralto singer. A successful one. Working with Leonard Bernstein. Doing operetta, Broadway musicals, Gilbert and Sullivan... invariably *on* the note.

The fame of *Keeping Up Appearances* – with worldwide broadcasts in the 1990s and a fan-base that allegedly extended to the late Pope Benedict (his Hyacinth impersonations, it was said, cheered up the daily business of the Vatican) – meant Routledge's distinguished singing past was virtually forgotten.

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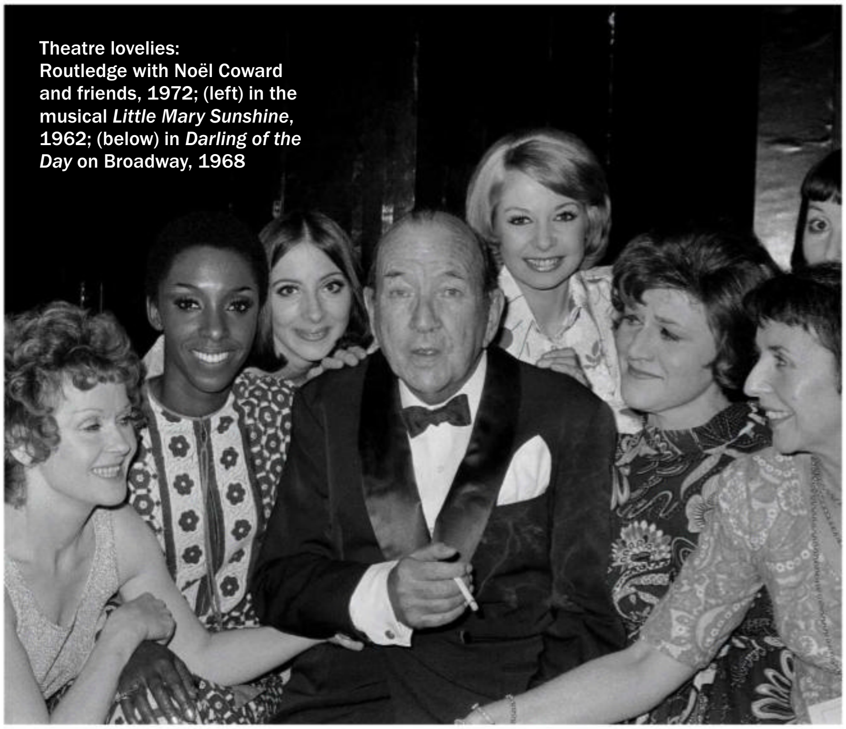
But in recent years she's made occasional appearances onstage to talk about it. And now 95, leading a quiet life in a genteel Chichester retirement home, shes talking to me. About the voice. About her love for music. And about her perhaps unlikely friendship with Dame Janet Baker, to whose voice she's been in thrall for decades – taking care to include the mezzo's Elgar *Dream of Gerontius* in her last batch (there have been two) of *Desert Island Discs*.

'We first met in 1966 in New York,' says Routledge, 'where I was in a play, and she was making her concert debut at the Town Hall. I'd been at university with the baritone John Shirley-Quirk, so we had a friend in common. He encouraged her to come and see my play. And afterwards we went out together to some dubious Irish pub-restaurant, where we talked for hours, as though we'd known each other for a long time.'

Nearly 60 years later, it really has been a long time. The two dames have been talking on the phone just before I arrived at the care home (it is Dame Janet's birthday). And on reflection, their friendship isn't really so strange in that it exists between two strong, formidably accomplished women brought up in the north of England in the 1930s with no-nonsense Northern values of hard work, integrity and the determination to succeed.

For Routledge, home was Birkenhead, where her father was in gentlemen's outfitting and her earliest ambition was to be a school headmistress by the age of 40: an achievement she somehow imagined as glamorous and involving 'a red sports car, with romances all over Europe'.

Instead, she went into theatre, making her stage debut at the Liverpool Playhouse in 1952 – but that was 'after a year of turmoil



Theatre lovelies: Routledge with Noël Coward and friends, 1972; (left) in the musical *Little Mary Sunshine*, 1962; (below) in *Darling of the Day* on Broadway, 1968

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wondering if I should become a concert singer. I'd done a good deal of singing at school; and then, in London, I studied privately with the head of lieder at the Guildhall, Walther Gruner [whose other students included Geraint Evans and Benjamin Luxon]. But in the end, I chose acting because I found that assuming another personality onstage was less terrifying than being myself on a recital platform.'

As things turned out, she also realised – quickly enough – that singing and acting didn't have to be alternative careers. The musicals and operetta beckoned, with a slew of Julian Slade shows and assorted forays into G&S that nearly altered the trajectory of her life.

'I was invited to join D'Oyly Carte – a company that, looking back, seemed stuck-in-the mud in its approach to staging but at least it honoured the material, which some don't. You can be too clever and untruthful. So, I was rather pleased when it summoned me for an audition at 10am on a Monday morning, and offered me a job. But then I decided to say no. It required long-term commitment, and I needed adventures.'

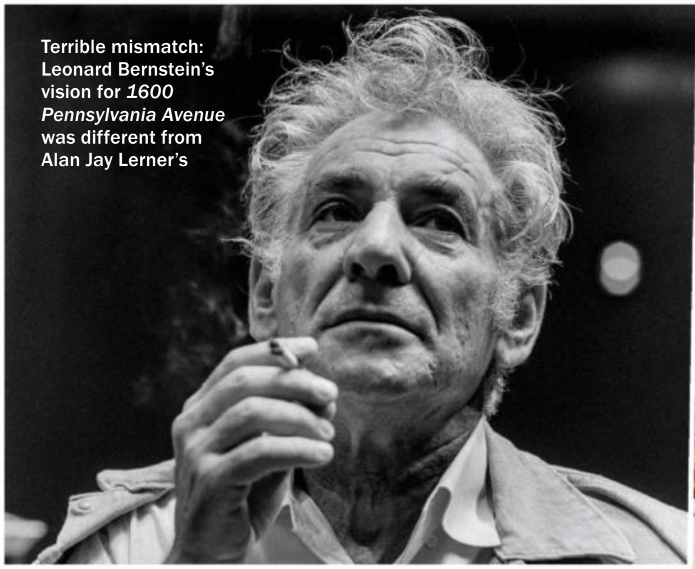
In the course of the adventures, G&S resurfaced fairly often. During 1966 she sang the title role in *Iolanthe*, Mad Margaret in *Ruddigore*, and Melissa in *Princess Ida* for a radio series of the Savoy operas conducted by Stanford Robinson. And in 1980 she played Ruth in a glitzy if unorthodox *Pirates of Penzance* that ran in the open air at New York's Central Park. With a cast including Kevin Kline and rock star Linda Ronstadt, it was a long way from D'Oyly Carte and, as she remembers, not immune to 'crazy ideas'. But 'it was magical when the moon shone on the lake. After New York it came to London, but without me. By then, I'd had enough.'

> 'I decided not to join D'Oyly Carte. It required a long-term commitment, and I needed adventures'

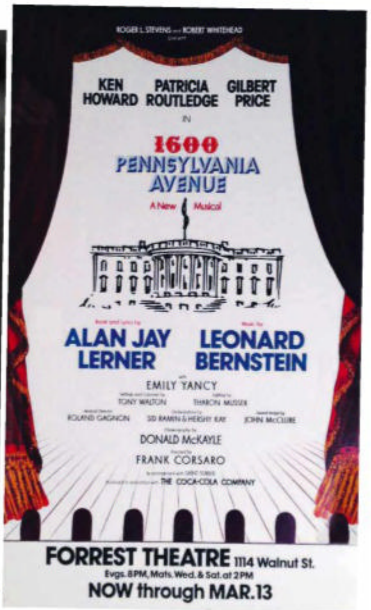
The wider world of operetta, though, was a recurring feature of her life. She sang Noël Coward, not least in a performance for The Master's 70th birthday when 'there were more stars in the audience than onstage'. In 1978 she took the title role in Offenbach's *Grand Duchess of Gérolstein* for the Camden Festival. And 1988 brought a TV film of *The Beggar's Opera*, directed by Jonathan Miller and conducted by John Eliot Gardiner. Cast as Mrs Peachum, she recalls it as a 'difficult role because it needs two separate voices. When Mrs Peachum speaks it's all cor-blimey, but when she sings it's pure Mozart. And it didn't help that Gardiner conducted from another studio.' So, she was following his beat by monitor? 'Oh no, he followed mine,' she replies with a corrective firmness entirely worthy of her sitcom alter-ego.

Something else she did with Miller was his Scottish Opera staging of Bernstein's *Candide*, also in 1988. Her role, the irrepressibly exuberant Old Lady, won her an Olivier Award. And it cemented a relationship with the composer that had started 12 years earlier, playing the female lead in what turned out to be his legendary Broadway failure, *1600 Pennsylvania Avenue*.

She'd been in a Jule Styne musical called *Darling of the Day* that ran on Broadway in 1968 and featured Vincent Price, who'd never done a musical before. Asked if the horror movie star could sing, Routledge replies, 'Not really.' But her own vocal performance won a Tony Award and



Terrible mismatch: Leonard Bernstein's vision for *1600 Pennsylvania Avenue* was different from Alan Jay Lerner's



the interest of Alan Jay Lerner, the celebrated lyricist of *My Fair Lady* who was now planning with Bernstein a musical pageant about the history of the White House - also known by its street address as 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. The Presidents and the First Ladies would all be sung by the same two singers. And an invitation duly came for Routledge to perform the Ladies; which she did, albeit amid mayhem and catastrophe.

'It was tragic,' she recalls; 'the mismatch of the century between Bernstein and Lerner, who seemed to be completely at odds about what they were writing. For Lerner it was a Broadway musical, for Bernstein it was a futuristic opera. And they could only work on it sporadically because Lenny was conducting around the world.

'The result was worthy: too didactic, too political, not the stuff of musical theatre. And it was far too long: four hours when the previews opened in Philadelphia. There were desperate revisions as we moved on to Washington, but we could all see that it wasn't right. When we reached New York, it opened on a Tuesday [4 May 1976] and closed the following Saturday.'

How did that feel? 'It was hard to go onstage and do a show you knew had already been killed by the critics, but when it folded there was great sadness. So much work had gone into it. And there were some very good songs, some of them written for me. There was never a cast recording, but I did record "Take Care of This House" which I sang at a tribute concert for Lerner at Drury Lane. There was another, "Duet for One", that was intended to stop the show. As I believe it did.'

In fact, Routledge's performance – especially in 'Duet for One', which involved her playing two characters at once, with a rotating wig – was virtually the only thing about the show the critics liked. And it ensured that she and Bernstein remained firm friends, 'which I valued. He would come to see the shows I was in and invite me to his concerts. I went over to Tanglewood for his 70th birthday. But he couldn't be persuaded to try *Pennsylvania Avenue* again.'

As the decades rolled on, so did Routledge's connections with the world of classical performance. She narrated Walton's *Façade*, did *Carnival of the Animals* with the Nash Ensemble, played Hildegard of Bingen in a TV biopic, and toured an entertainment about Myra Hess in wartime with the pianist Piers Lane. On the musicals front, she played in Nicholas Hytner's production of *Carousel* at the National Theatre. And more recently, an old recording from the 1960s of her singing 'Climb Every Mountain' from *The Sound of Music* acquired cult status online after it was played at the funeral of Betty Boothroyd, sometime speaker of the House of Commons and another no-nonsense Northern woman who was a longstanding friend.

As you'd expect of someone in their 90s, active music-making isn't so much on the cards these days, though there's a sort of substitute in the form of the Patricia Routledge Foundation which supports classical concerts – its decisions governed (as she's keen to say) by a group of trustees rather than her own taste. But her taste is clear to anyone who roots out her old *Desert Island Discs* selections: Schubert, Shostakovich, Holst, John Rutter… plus, of course, Dame Janet Baker. Though neither Mendelssohn nor Chopin feature, she *can* tell the difference: Hyacinth *Boo-kay* be damned. But in her choice of luxury, the ghost of Hyacinth does linger: she requested china cups and saucers with a silver teapot.

'That was not a joke,' she says when I suggest it might have been. 'And it would still be what I ask for.' Even desert islands have appearances to keep up.

In good voice: the art of inflection

Pitch, Pace and Power

How song can help speech

After a lifetime's singing, Dame Patricia Routledge knows a thing or two about the human voice, but still describes it as 'a miracle' – which may explain why she is honorary president of the Association of English Singers and Speakers, and why she sponsors annual performance prizes at conservatoires like the Royal Northern College and Royal Academy.

She's interested in the connection between speech and song, and says the latter helps the former – from the rhythmic sense an actor needs in comedy through to the breath control required for epic sentences in plays by Oscar Wilde.

But something else that singing gives the spoken word is sensitivity to pitch. 'With far too many people on TV and radio, everything is on one note. They drone. And they end phrases with the same inflexion. They should learn to sing. I had a wonderful teacher when I was young who talked about the three essential Ps: Pitch, Pace and Power. People who use their voices for a living need to know this.'

While they're at it, Routledge thinks they also need to keep the voice in good health, 'which means living carefully. Whatever you're doing during the day, it's at the end of it that you have to be at your peak. There's only one solution: lead a nun's life.'

Star-Spangled Bangers

As Donald Trump is sworn in as America's 47th president this month, Terry Blain looks back at the music that has shaped presidential inaugurations

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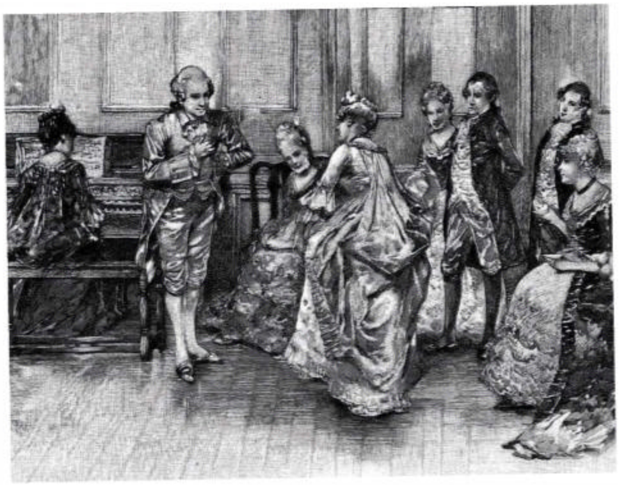
George Washington was, it seems, an elegant and skilful dancer, famed for his participation in what he deemed 'an agreeable and innocent amusement'. That is probably why, a week after his inauguration as the first president of the United States on 30 April 1789, he enthusiastically accepted an invitation to a function hosted by the Dancing Assembly of New York City. He danced 'two cotillions and a minuet' as guest of honour, an occasion later commemorated by an engraving in *Harper's Bazaar* magazine.

While not officially an 'inauguration ball', the Dancing Assembly's gathering was nonetheless an event of historic significance. It initiated the now firmly established tradition of organising parties and celebrations to mark the installation of a new president, and of putting music at the heart of them. Since Washington's unofficial dance soirée, the scale of inauguration festivities has, in fact, burgeoned remarkably: Bill Clinton attended a record-breaking 15 inaugural balls in 1997, with George HW Bush running a handy second, with 11 in 1989.

The first piece of music unequivocally associated with presidential ceremonials was written by the composer and violinist Philip Phile, for George Washington in 1789. Entitled *The President's March*, the tune combined a distinctly Handelian demeanour (Phile was a German immigrant) with the measured dignity appropriate to a newly emerging nation. A decade later, with words added, it became the rousingly patriotic *Hail, Columbia*, sung as a kind of national anthem for a century thereafter.

Comparing the relatively well-mannered stride of Phile's *President's March* with the zippily upbeat gait of *Jefferson's March*, written in 1801 for Thomas Jefferson's inauguration, is to sense the significant leap in self-confidence the fledgling United States of America made during its first 12 years of existence. Bristlingly go-ahead in its rhythms, *Jefferson's March* infectiously encapsulates the foundational strain of American can-do-ism which became a hallmark of its people. Musically, 1801 was significant for another reason too – it marked the first performance at an inauguration of

> *Jefferson's March* encapsulates the can-do-ism which became an American hallmark



In all weathers: Yo-Yo Ma and Gabriela Montero prepare to perform at Barack Obama's 2009 inauguration; (right) George Washington was a skilled and elegant dancer

the United States Marine Band (nicknamed 'The President's Own'), which has played at every inauguration since.

Eight years later, in 1809, the habit of informally marking the swearing-in of a new president with music and dance took a major step towards becoming a full-scale national institution. That year, friends of James Madison combined to organise an 'inauguration ball' for the president-elect, which took place on 4 March 'at Mr Long's Hotel' in Washington. A newly composed piece, predictably entitled *Madison's March*, greeted the president and his wife Dolley as they arrived at the function. Opinions varied as to the quality of the music-making and dancing, which occupied those present until midnight. One newspaper thought the ball 'the most brilliant and crowded ever known in Washington'. John Quincy Adams, a future president himself, was somewhat less enthusiastic. 'The crowd was excessive,' he grumbled, 'the heat oppressive and the entertainment bad'.

Madison's ball undoubtedly crystallised the notion that the inaugural celebration was now an important place for America's movers and shakers to be seen, and for new, gladhanding allegiances to be established. Throughout the 19th century, the celebrations grew in size and importance, and much new music was written for them including catchy campaign songs and the traditional commemorative marches. Among the best of these was the dignified, quasi-operatic *President Garfield's Inauguration March*, written in 1881 by America's 'March King' John Philip Sousa.

Glimpses of how opulent a social occasion the inaugural ball had become, and how central music was to fuelling its festivities, are found in the diary of the poet Walt Whitman. Observing the activity surrounding Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural ball in 1865, Whitman poignantly recalled treating Civil War wounded in the same location (the Patent Office Building in Washington). 'What a different scene'

Glitz and glamour: Frank Sinatra escorts Jackie Kennedy at JFK's star-studded inauguration ball; (below) Dorothy Maynor sang at Truman's 1949 gala

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the dance and supper rooms now presented, he recorded, as they filled with 'beautiful women, perfumes, the violins' sweetness, the polka and the waltz'.

With the 20th century came a massive expansion in the realm of telecommunications, with radio, sound recording, movies and television all in turn fuelling a feverish cult of global celebrity. These influences profoundly affected the way in which presidential inaugurations were celebrated, and the type of music played at them. Where once decorous quadrilles and rousing marches ruled the day, with 'light' classical stylings as the default template, increasingly presidents invited jazz, folk and other popular genres to the party, with stars of stage and screen adding charismatic impact to the general razzmatazz of the occasion.

The election (for the third time) of President Franklin D Roosevelt is often cited as the point at which the inaugural 'gala' (as the 1941 organisers called it) morphed into what one commentator has memorably termed 'a star-studded variety show'. With actor Douglas Fairbanks Jr. emceeing in his Navy uniform, guest performers included Charlie Chaplin, Irving Berlin and the mezzo-soprano Risë Stevens, who sang arias from Bizet's *Carmen* and Oscar Strauss's operetta *The Chocolate Soldier*.

But perhaps the 'turn' who most vividly reflected the new, cheek-by-jowl jostling of classical and vernacular traditions in the inaugural arena was the 20-year-old acting phenom Mickey Rooney. The multi-talented Rooney brought with him a three-movement 'symphony' he had written, named *Melodante*, and proceeded to astound onlookers by playing it on the piano. As an encore, Rooney rolled out impressions of his fellow actors Clark Gable and Lionel Barrymore – highbrow and lowbrow scrunched together in stunningly vaudevillian juxtaposition. The audience loved it.

> Particularly significant was the appearance at Harry S Truman's 1949 gala of the soprano Dorothy Maynor, the first African American to sing at an inauguration

The new strain of populist spectacle injected into inaugural celebrations by Roosevelt was here to stay. Gene Kelly, Abbott and Costello, John Wayne and Ethel Merman were among the numerous showbiz performers who featured in the post-war period, but classical performers held their end up too. Particularly significant was the appearance at Harry S Truman's 1949 gala of the soprano Dorothy Maynor, the first African American to sing at an inaugural event. Maynor reputedly knew 100 operas by heart, but racial segregation meant she never once set foot upon a US operatic stage. Eight years later, in an even more symbolic moment, contralto Marian Anderson sang the national anthem at the inauguration ceremony of Dwight D Eisenhower, the first African American to do so.

For sheer stardust factor, however, it's generally acknowledged that no inaugural gala has ever quite equalled John F Kennedy's in 1963. With Frank Sinatra organising, an astonishing array of performing talent – including singers Ella Fitzgerald, Nat King Cole, Harry Belafonte and Mahalia Jackson – was rostered for a gala which in one writer's opinion 'more closely resembled Saturday night at Caesars Palace'.

'The President's Own': United States Marine Band plays at Donald Trump's 2017 inauguration; (left) actor Mickey Rooney charms Eleanor Roosevelt

Again, though, classical music got a significant look-in. Maestro-of-the-moment Leonard Bernstein conducted the 70-strong orchestra, opening proceedings with a new work of his own – the punchy *Fanfare for the Inauguration of John F Kennedy*, whose buoyant, energetic syncopations seemed a perfect upbeat to the Kennedy era. And for the first time a classical composer was commissioned to write a piece specifically for a presidential inauguration. John La Montaine was the composer chosen, and his evocative overture *From Sea to Shining Sea* has undeservedly gone out of fashion since.

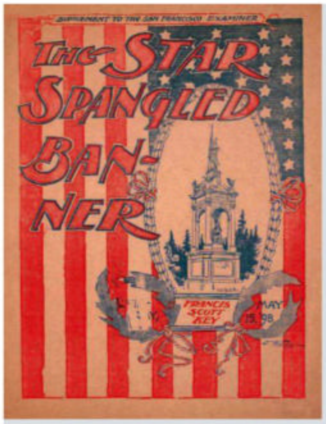
While the trend for what writer Amanda Petrusich has called 'extravagantly dressed and jittery pop stars' has only strengthened in our media-centric modern era, classical performers still pop up regularly at inaugural celebrations. Soprano Jessye Norman and mezzo-soprano Marilyn Horne both sang the Shaker song 'Simple Gifts' for their respective presidents – Ronald Reagan (1985) and Bill Clinton (1993) – while mezzos Susan Graham and Denyce Graves entertained George W Bush in 2005.

Classical performers were also responsible for one of the most newsworthy mini-scandals to have accompanied inaugurations down the years. In January 2009, a quartet of violinist Itzhak Perlman, cellist Yo-Yo Ma, pianist Gabriela Montero and clarinettist Anthony McGill (see p30) was scheduled to play *Air and Simple Gifts*, a new piece by film composer John Williams, immediately before Barack Obama took his oath of office outside the US Capitol.

When sub-zero temperatures (with wind chill added) threatened to break strings, crack instrument casings and play havoc with intonation, the quartet instead mimed its way through a recording made as a precaution two days previously. While some critical huffing and puffing over this cheat-sheet solution predictably followed, Yo-Yo Ma was unapologetic. 'If we had not done that, we would have had four-and-a-half minutes of absolute disaster,' he commented. 'It was wicked cold.'

Organisers of this month's inauguration, where Donald J Trump becomes the 47th US president, will be hoping for better weather. They will also be hoping the brouhaha surrounding the musical celebrations at Trump's 2017 inaugural is not repeated. A raft of celebrity artists – Andrea Bocelli, Elton John and Charlotte Church included – declined to take part, citing various reasons. Church was among those pulling no punches. 'Your staff have asked me to sing at your inauguration,' she tweeted to the incoming president. 'A simple Internet search would show I think you're a tyrant. Bye.'

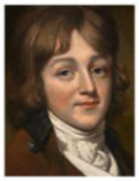
Whether the quadrennial injection of patriotic fervour provided by presidential celebrations can continue long into an uncertain future is a moot question. For many, though, the sense of national unity they foster remains important. 'Music is sometimes presented as a kind of impartial panacea, a bridge between enemies,' is how Amanda Petrusich puts it. 'That's a lot to ask of art. But it's still a nice fantasy to indulge, even if just for a night.'


SUPPLEMENT TO THE SAN FRANCISCO EXAMINER
THE STAR SPANGLED BAN-NER
FRANCIS SCOTT KEY
MAY 15 98

Stirring success: a national pride

Anthem for America

The Star-Spangled Banner



It's a curiosity of American history that for over 150 years after the United States first declared itself an independent nation, it had no official national anthem. This was rectified in 1931, when the US Congress installed 'The Star-Spangled Banner' in that illustrious position.

The anthem's words are from a poem by Francis Scott Key (above), an attorney who witnessed a British naval bombardment of Fort McHenry, Baltimore in 1814. Amid dramatic images of 'bombs bursting in air', Key's poem stirringly celebrates the sight of the American flag still flying defiantly over the ramparts, symbolising 'the land of the free and the home of the brave'.

His words were swiftly partnered to a tune already well-known in America – that of 'The Anacreontic Song', a comic parody sung at convivial gatherings of a gentlemen's club in London. A publisher soon dubbed the new composition 'The Star-Spangled Banner', and its popularity was instant. With its wide intervals and a range of 19 semitones, it is not the easiest song to sing. Nor, perhaps, to memorise: one survey found that two-thirds of Americans don't know all the words to their own anthem.

Lessons for life

It's official: playing an instrument is good for your mind and body. But, asks Ariane Todes, what other life skills can musicians teach us?

It is a truth universally acknowledged that playing a musical instrument is good for you. Study after study has shown improved cognitive abilities, lower blood pressure and even protection against dementia. And these are just the scientifically testable benefits. What of the more intangible life skills and values?

When a child picks up an instrument, they start on a path that can take many directions, through situations that are quite unique to classical music – practising on their own, intense one-to-one lessons with teachers, passing auditions, group music-making, performing on stage, travelling the world, constantly working with new colleagues. But how can we apply these skills to other parts of our lives?

Listening

Maybe the most fundamental skill that music teaches is listening – both to ourselves and the people around us. Jacqueline Thomas has been cellist of the Brodsky Quartet since its inception 50 years ago and explains: 'We're playing a complicated line ourselves, trying to express an emotion, at the same time being completely aware of the triplets that are being played in the second violin part or the descant coming from a higher instrument – listening and adjusting, but not being led by it. It's a constant balance of how to appear completely immersed in your own performance and yet listening to the other parts. That kind of multi-tasking is great for the brain.'

> 'Music can help people learn the important to-and-fro skill of having a conversation'

Might this process help people socially? Thomas thinks so: 'There's something about the balance in a room and the awareness of who's

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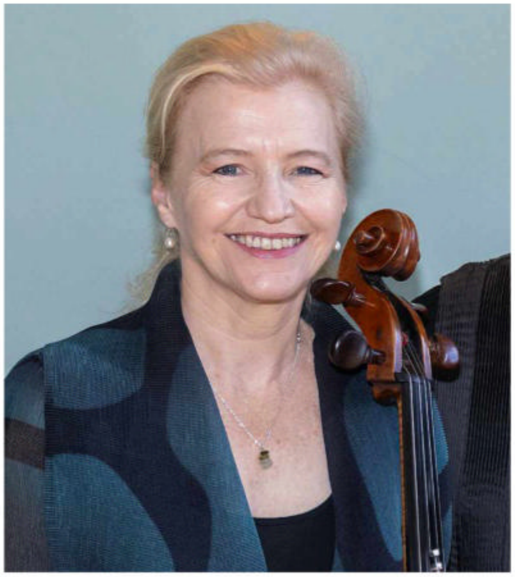

Musical toolbox: (clockwise from main) the joy of music-making; Brodsky Quartet cellist Jacqueline Thomas; baritone Thomas Allen and actress and singer Kelli O'Hara in the Met production of Lehar's *The Merry Widow*, 2014

standing around you and if it's somebody else's turn to speak. Many people don't know how to have a conversation – they simply talk about themselves. It could be that music helps people to understand the to-and-fro of a conversation.'

A corollary is that (paradoxically) musicians know how to be quiet, she says: 'It's astonishing how many people don't know how to sit still and be quiet, yet you can walk into an orchestral rehearsal and 120 people are absolutely silent. Any musician going to a concert knows how not to cough, even if they are desperate to, whereas people who don't understand what it's like to be in the musical moment are likely to cough at an inappropriate moment or shift in their seat.'

Teamwork

Another aspect of being a musician – solo recitals apart – is as team sport. Ask Catherine Arlidge, artistic and educational director of National Children's Orchestras, which trains kids from a young age. 'We work with children from 8 to 14, which is a transitional phase, when you're going from thinking only about yourself to starting to think about other people and the world,' she says. 'Self-preservation is important, but equally, there is a whole world out there of which you're part. You start to appreciate that and to think empathetically.'

This musical teamwork is complex, but offers life lessons: 'One of the things that's difficult in an orchestra is that you have to find that balance between who you are and where you fit in a bigger jigsaw. It's important not to lose yourself in the mix. Being thoughtful, present and true to who you are while being there is like being part of society in microcosm. You have to conform, but also bring something that's you.'

The benefits are genuinely life changing, Arlidge says. 'One of the massive drivers is a sense of community – that you're part of something bigger than yourself. You belong, you have an identity – that's a primeval need.'

The legendary baritone Thomas Allen, who retired recently after a 60-year career, says he preferred the group aspect of opera. He was in the company of Welsh National Opera early in his career, and later at the Royal Opera House: 'I love the teamwork. We were close colleagues and understood one another and the way we worked. One week, you'd be singing a major role, the next something smaller. There was wonderful camaraderie and involvement. You saw people on a regular basis and got to know them well – their families, whatever they were experiencing in life. It made you very tolerant of variations in performance levels. We're human beings, we have life to deal with and sometimes it's not easy. It puts you in touch with those aspects of life.'

Critical thinking

Alone in a practice room, musicians must analyse their sound in the utmost detail. They learn this kind of critical thinking from their teachers and eventually discover how to do it on their own. Arlidge explains: 'You get to a point where your teacher is your coach, but you're your own coach as well, looking analytically at how you're doing things, videoing yourself, observing, experimenting, changing, risking. Those skills help us to be better at whatever we're doing – the skill of mastery, of honing something.'

Diplomacy

Musicians must be their own harshest critics, but it's one thing to tick oneself off and another to do it to someone else. Jacqueline Thomas says: 'In the rehearsal situation, you have to criticise each other all the time but make sure it doesn't come across as criticism, trying to be more diplomatic. The younger you are, the less you understand that skill and the more you start pointing a finger at everyone who was out of tune. It's much better to say, "Shall we practise that passage for tuning?" We then can think about it as a group. You learn that skill as you go along, and it turns you into a slightly more diplomatic person.'

The same goes for soloists working with conductors. Martin Roscoe, concert pianist and professor of piano at Guildhall School of Music and Drama, learnt early on how to navigate conductors: 'Not being confrontational at all and knowing when not to speak is useful. It's so important to know how to manage a situation to achieve a professional outcome. Even if there are difficulties or you're working with a

Inspired: a young orchestra player

Tools for the future

Playing in youth ensembles

Anyone who has been to a youth orchestra concert has experienced the power that the communal music-making experience has on young people – not just on stage but throughout their lives.

Last summer, the 13 and 14 year-olds of National Children's Orchestras gave a concert including Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony. 'There were 14-year-old boys holding each other and literally sobbing because it was so profound,' remembers Catherine Arlidge. 'The parents were saying, "I can't thank you enough for what you've done for my child." They transform as individuals. If you ask them, they talk first about friendships with like-minded people, and secondly, about music and concerts. It's about making something incredible together.'

Brodsky Quartet cellist Jacqueline Thomas still meets people who were affected by the Brodsky Song Show, more than 20 years ago – a project that took the quartet to six different schools to write songs with students. 'The kids really opened up during that week,' she says. 'Some found it a brilliant way of saying things they couldn't say before. Many of them were dealing with awful self-doubt and anxiety, and this was a time when it wasn't talked about by teenagers. It was a very valuable tool for them.'

Fuelled by curiosity: (main) a spark was lit early for pianist Martin Roscoe; (left) Catherine Arlidge recognises the importance of teamwork

conductor who's not very good, you still have to get the best out of the situation.'

Mental control

Beyond the notes and the instrument, much of a performer's life is governed by what goes on inside their heads. 'There are a lot of mind games in music, and you have to be able to sort them out, not least the ones you play with yourself,' says Thomas. 'You're constantly telling yourself you're rubbish while trying to come across to an audience as a genius. It's a daily battle and you have to keep reminding yourself that you can do this. No one's ever said you shouldn't be on that stage, and you've had lots of good reviews, so maybe it's okay. It's a question of logicising it. It's healthy to have self-doubt, though. There needs to be a certain amount of humility.'

Allen recalls learning how to play mind games following a bad experience as a young singer at a first night in Japan in the 1970s: 'I had a week to wait before the next performance. Living through that week was not easy, and I had to find a way of dealing with it. There were things I turned to, whether it was putting a pair of binoculars to my eyes and looking at birds, or drawing, reading or doing something that took me entirely away from music. I had to find a way to do that for seven days, knowing the pressure I was under. I did get through it and it was a lesson to me that you mustn't judge everything on one experience. It wasn't about vocal exercise – it was simply a mental exercise of control.'

Resilience

This is a vital part of being a musician, Allen says: 'You just have to be. In a busy musical life, there are challenges that beset you on a daily basis. Some are relatively minor and you deal with them, and others require a lot of thought, and musical and technical preparation. Most of the time you can surmount those difficulties, and occasionally you just have to say, "Look, I can't." Every musician – and those from many other professions – encounters this.'

Part of this is courage, says Arlidge: 'You're standing up and risking humiliation. There's strength in being comfortable with the uncomfortable. If you always want to be comfortable in life, then what are you achieving?'

Curiosity

The finest musicians often have a hunger for intellectual pursuits beyond music. Allen's curiosity has helped him throughout his career, he says: 'It keeps you sane and makes you a more interesting person, to be interested in how a great painting was put together, what a poet thinks or how a composer comes up with a symphony. If a creature always stays the same, it will eventually perish. That would happen to anyone who was too insular in the way they look at their life.'

Roscoe is also fuelled by curiosity. He remembers going to the BBC Proms aged 12 and turning overnight from dutiful student to piano addict and autodidact. He says: 'It opened a huge door and made me a very curious person. I never had an interest in other arts, but I found the connections between the visual arts, literature, film and music. One thing leads to another, and I read bits of philosophy and politics. I don't know I can say that being a musician has led me down that road, but when I look at some of my other friends who are not particularly into music, they don't seem to have that same curiosity.'

But chicken-and-egg-wise: which comes first? Are great musicians born curious, resilient, critical thinking, good at listening and all the rest? Or does their life in music make them so? It would be impossible to prove any causation, and there are surely many counter examples by way of successful musicians who lack any or all of the skills discussed. Maybe what we can say is that playing an instrument offers the possibility of developing and exercising these skills, with or without any natural talent. From there, perhaps muscle memory or willpower helps to transfer them to our outside lives, to our own benefit and that of society. And wouldn't the world be a better place if everyone had that possibility?

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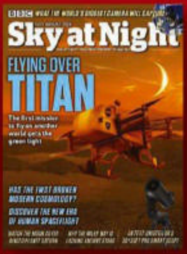
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MUSICAL DESTINATIONS

Eisenstadt Austria

Rebecca Franks heads to the Austrian town where Joseph Haydn began his working life as kapellmeister for the noble Esterházy family

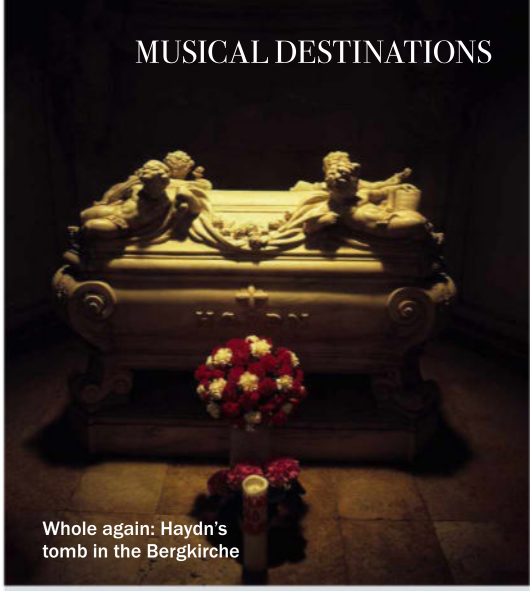
'Pinch-me moment': Chamber Orchestra of Europe pictured in the Haydnsaal

Joseph Haydn was the 'father of the symphony', and so I experience a bit of a pinch-me moment when I step into the very concert hall in which some of those symphonies were likely first heard. The Haydnsaal is a simple shoebox design, but beautifully, ornately decorated, with an impressive ceiling covered in frescoes on classical themes. I'm told by my tour guide that it's also renowned for its acoustics, and the first concert I hear in the space, given by the Chamber Orchestra of Europe (COE), confirms it. There's a warmth and clarity to the sound, and the ensemble absolutely gleams in their performances of two of Haydn's symphonies, even if No. 82 was written for a Parisian audience and No. 100 for his second visit to London.

I'm here in Eisenstadt for the Herbstgold Festival, which takes place each autumn, bringing first-class musicians to the small town an hour from Vienna, in the Austrian state of Burgenland. This is where Haydn began his working life as kapellmeister for the powerful Esterházys, whose ancestral seat was the Schloss Esterházy. He worked for the music-loving aristocrats for nearly 30 years, first in Eisenstadt and then in Esterháza, until the death of his patron Nikolaus I in 1790. It was living outside the major cities that, in Haydn's own words, 'forced him to become original'.

The dignified palace, which still dominates Eisenstadt today, began life as a medieval castle and was remodelled during the Baroque period. A guided tour comes highly recommended, not only to understand the family's history and the building's architecture, but for

Spot the artists: (above) Herbstgold director Julian Rachlin; Argerich takes a bow after her Saint-Saëns performance; (below) dignified Schloss Esterházy



Whole again: Haydn's tomb in the Bergkirche

Head over heels

Haydn's tomb

Haydn died in Vienna in 1809 – and today, it's possible to pay his marble tomb a visit in the Bergkirche in Eisenstadt. That's not always been the case, thanks to a macabre story. After his death, Haydn was buried in a cemetery in Vienna, but his skull was stolen from his grave by two men interested in phrenology. Even in 1820, when his body was moved to Eisenstadt, it was with a decoy skull, given by the thieves. Haydn's head ended up in a glass case in Vienna's Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, but in 1954 it was finally returned and reunited with his body in Eisenstadt.

details of what daily life would have been like for those living and working there. Haydn himself lived in a house just down the road, which has been preserved as the Haydn Museum. His home burned down not once, but twice, so his original furniture does not survive, but a visit is still illuminating – not least to see the autograph copy Beethoven made of Haydn's String Quartet in E flat, Op. 20. As I'm strolling around this sedate town, with its pedestrianised high street and information panels detailing Haydn's haunts, an important thread of music history feels just within reach.

The violinist and conductor Julian Rachlin, who has been artistic director of the Herbstgold Festival since 2021, says that the intimacy of coming to a concert in Eisenstadt rather than in a big city is part of the festival's appeal. 'People run into artists,' he says – and it's true, I do spot bass-baritone Bryn Terfel, who later gives a wonderful song recital with harpist Hannah Stone and pianist Annabel Thwaite in the Haydnsaal, at the breakfast bar in the hotel. 'And the people living here are very warm,' adds Rachlin, as we chat over a pre-concert bite. Eisenstadt is also a melting pot of central European cultures – for centuries, and during Haydn's era, this corner of Austria was part of the Habsburg Empire's Kingdom of Hungary. It's only 25 minutes or so by car to Hungary, while Bratislava is just an hour away.

That's reflected in Rachlin's programming, which already features various returning musical guests. I make my first acquaintance with the Janoska Ensemble, a trio of brothers from Bratislava, who race around their instruments with virtuosic panache and bring a distinctive improvisatory touch to classical pieces. 'They're geniuses and come here every year,' says Rachlin. He laughs. 'I think the audience would murder me if I didn't have them.' And their exhilarating set does indeed go down well with the audience, as does the second half of the concert, featuring a group called a Hundred Gypsy Violins. A group of Romany musicians from Budapest, who have been designated a Hungarian national treasure by the country's government, they play with exciting passion and an up-front style.

> 'They're geniuses: the audience would murder me if I didn't invite them back'

If orchestral and chamber music are two pillars of the festival, it also offers song recitals, world music, jazz and programmes intertwining words and music. Repertoire choices tend to the Classical and Romantic eras, though Rachlin is seeing where he can lead his audience with pieces like the Penderecki Sextet. Supporting excellent young artists is also a passion, but star power isn't to be underestimated. Next year's line-up includes pianist András Schiff, violinist Janine Jansen and Hollywood actor John Malkovich. I'm delighted to make a rare sighting of the pianist Martha Argerich in a thoroughly entertaining performance of Saint-Saëns's *Carnival of the Animals*, narrated by her daughter Annie Dutoit-Argerich. 'What a strange animal,' deadpans Dutoit-Argerich, who charms the audience with her English narration. 'Lynx-like eyes, silver mane… It looks like a pianist… caught specially from the wild for this carnival in the Haydnsaal.' Over 250 years after Haydn lead his orchestra here, musical legends are still drawn to this hallowed venue.

Herbstgold 2025 runs 10-21 September.
Further info: www.herbstgold.at

JULIA WESELY, ANDREAS TISCHLER, ANDREAS HAFENSCHER, VASILKA BALEVSKA, GETTY

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Elisabetta de Gambarini

Stephen Pritchard relates the sparkling talent, entrepreneurial drive and shameful treatment of an unheralded 18th-century musical pioneer

ILLUSTRATION: MATT HERRING

Composer, instrumentalist, singer, impresario and art dealer, Elisabetta de Gambarini was a defiantly independent musician, working successfully in the deeply patriarchal world of 18th-century London. Yet the career of this highly talented young woman was to end in tragedy after she endured domestic violence, estrangement and a scandalous diplomatic cover-up.

Her life had begun with many advantages. Born in the capital in 1731 to wealthy, well-connected Italian parents, Gambarini grew up in Mayfair. Her father, Count Carlo Gambarini, was counsellor to Frederick I of Sweden and a noted collector of fine art. Her mother, Giovanna Stradiotti, was an opera singer, keyboard player and teacher, who encouraged her daughter's exceptional talents, enlisting the composer Francesco Geminiani to become one of her teachers.

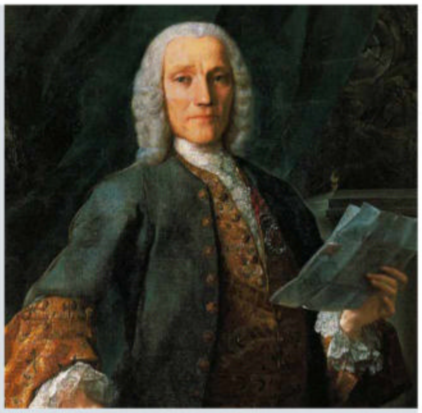
As a composer, she was the first woman in England to publish her own keyboard music

Even at the tender age of 15, Gambarini's mezzo-soprano voice was being noticed, not least by George Frideric Handel, who auditioned her at his Brook Street home, and between 1745 and '48 cast her at Covent Garden and at the Haymarket Theatre in the *Occasional Oratorio, Messiah, Semele* and, perhaps most notably, in the oratorio *Judas Maccabaeus*, where she created the substantial role of the Israelite Woman.

Then, quite suddenly, she stopped singing for Handel. We don't know exactly why, but it would seem that her entrepreneurial career was taking off, not least as a composer who was about to become the first woman in England to publish her own keyboard music. Newspaper advertisements of the time show her busy as an impresario, staging concerts of her music alongside works by her contemporaries. Handel remained a loyal supporter, becoming one of many prominent subscribers who attended her concerts and bought her manuscripts. Close family connections with members of the nobility guaranteed her a paying audience, and meant she could attract the day's top performers to sing and play on the same platform. And she had novelty value as a talented young woman, leading from the front. Some of the advertisements describe her as 'conductor', but we can't be sure that she conducted in the accepted sense, as conducting was still in its infancy. It might be more accurately seen as producing and staging. Whatever, she attracted large audiences.

Gambarini produced her first benefit concert at London's Haymarket Theatre on 28 March 1748, promising she would perform her new vocal works and play two new pieces she had composed for the organ. Top-price tickets were half a guinea, sold at her home address. Gallery seats were five shillings. The fact that the gallery doors would open at 4pm for an evening performance is perhaps a measure of her curiosity value and increasing popularity.

All this was going on while she was preparing Opus 1, *Six Sets of Lessons for the Harpsichord*, for publication. She



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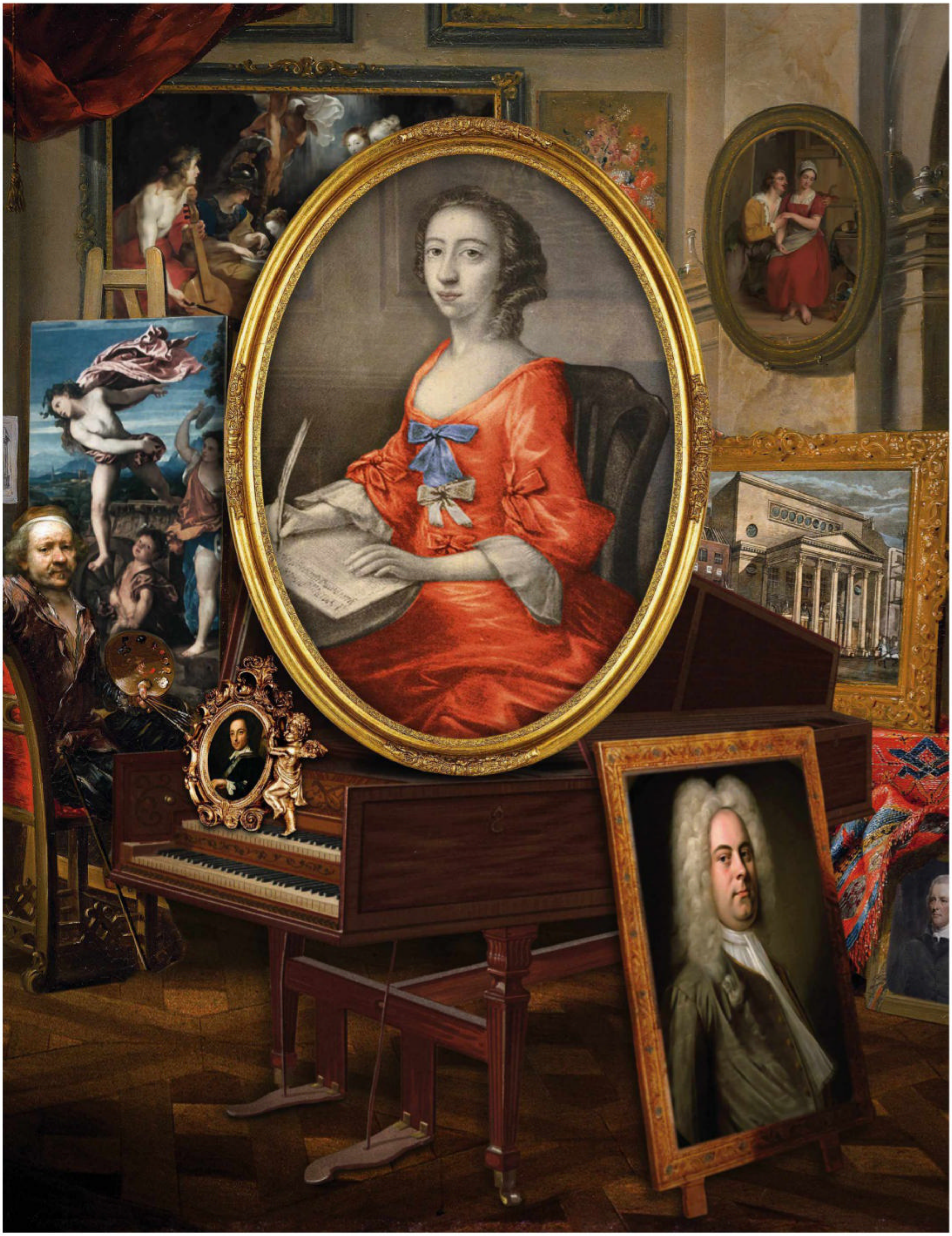
Gambarini's style

Overture Young Elisabetta de Gambarini, known first as a singer dubbed 'The Italian Girl', was adept at using her family connections to approach members of the nobility and prominent politicians for subscriptions to pay for the publication of her music and to attend her many concerts.

Allegro She was a young woman in a hurry, publishing her first two sets of harpsichord sonatas at the age of 18, while at the same time building a career as an impresario.

Variations Her sonatas can be seen as a bridge between Baroque and Classical styles, probably influenced by the *Essercizi per gravicembalo* by Domenico Scarlatti (pictured above), published in London in 1739.

Gavotte Musical London was wild for all things Italian in this period and Gambarini would have known and learned from several masters who performed and published in the capital, among them Giovanni Battista Pescetti, Francesco Geminiani (one of her teachers), Domenico Alberti, Baldassare Galuppi and Pietro Domenico Paradies.



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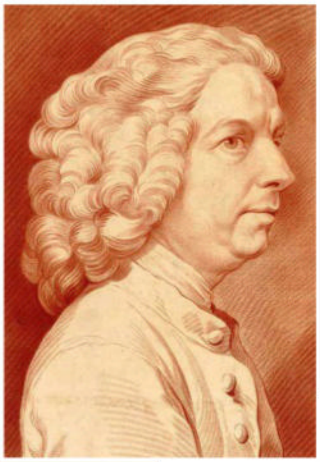


dedicated it to 'Viscountess Howe of the Kingdom of Ireland' – no doubt a wealthy subscriber to her concerts. It's important to remember here that the term 'lessons' was often applied to published sets of sonatas or suites, so this is not an instruction manual. It is, however, plainly aimed at the lucrative market of domestic music-making – and therefore at women of a certain class for whom technical facility at the harpsichord was seen as an essential social accomplishment.

These pieces were quickly followed by Op. 2, a larger set entitled *Lessons for the Harpsichord, Intermix'd with Italian and English Songs*, Gambarini reaching higher this time with a dedication to Frederick, Prince of Wales. This edition is notable for several reasons beyond the music. For instance, it carries the only known portrait of Gambarini which, as the academic Alison DeSimone notes in her treatise on the composer, presents an image of a confident, wealthy young woman, pictured composing at a desk. In the background of the engraving we see a harpsichord and a stringed instrument, probably a viola di gamba. Framed canvasses hang on the wall behind her, quite possibly from her father's large collection.

Under the portrait runs the motto 'Virtute duce, comite Fortuna' – 'When virtue leads, fortune follows'. DeSimone says this is a phrase appropriate to understanding her biography: 'Gambarini promoted her own feminine virtues as an 18th-century woman, but she was also a musical entrepreneur in a male-dominated world, well aware of what fortunes a successful professional life could bring.'

After her father died, Gambarini hit upon the idea of combining art sales with music

Turn the page and you find a list of subscribers. It's a sort of *Who's Who* of mid-18th-century London society, topped by a Prince Lobkowicz – possibly Ferdinand, sixth Prince Lobkowicz, the Bohemian nobleman credited with carrying printed editions of Handel's oratorios back to Vienna. At least half of the names are nobles or politicians, including the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough, William Pitt and Horace Walpole. Clearly, Gambarini was very successful in cultivating supporters who would add lustre to her name and to her music.

Gambarini continued to compose keyboard and vocal works for her concerts, which she staged right up until 1764. After her father died in 1760, ever the entrepreneur she hit upon the idea of combining art sales with music. Count Gambarini had left her and her mother a sizeable collection of Renaissance and Baroque art – one advertisement lists pictures by, among others, Raphael, Correggio, Andrea del Sarto, Leonardo da Vinci, Titian, Pietro da Cortona, Rembrandt, Rubens and Van Dyck. For the next four years, she held concerts in her home, hoping to make sales to her patrons of these treasures, but as DeSimone discovered, she met with little success, and in an eventual auction after her death, prices fetched were so low it suggests that many were mere copies.

For more than 200 years, little was thought to be known about Gambarini's life beyond her obvious talent for composition and performance. However, in 2018 DeSimone uncovered some disturbing papers in the National Archive at Kew. In 1764, just months after Gambarini had married Étienne Chazell, Master of the Horse to the French ambassador, her mother, who was living with them in the Strand, reported that she and her daughter had been violently assaulted by Chazell several times. Court papers reveal that witnesses living nearby told of Gambarini's distress. 'It appears that her Husband, very soon after the Marriage, beat and treated his Wife in a very bad and brutal manner in so much that the Neighbourhood have been frequently alarmed with her cries of murder from the Windows of her Apartment on those Occasions.' Gambarini's mother also accused Chazell of trying to burn down the house while she and her daughter slept.

Gambarini, by now pregnant, was clearly in danger, and a warrant was

Gambarini's world: (left, r-l) Handel, an early employer; Geminiani, her teacher; pianist Margherita Torretta, a present-day champion

issued for Chazell's arrest. Robert Moylan, a constable, was dispatched with two assistants to find Chazell, but disaster struck. As the men apprehended Chazell at the ambassador's house in Soho Square they were accosted by the ambassador's servants and locked in a room, allowing Chazell to get away to France and never return. The law had blundered by making an arrest on what was effectively French soil. A diplomatic row ensued, with apologies to the ambassador from the arresting magistrate, and a shameful cover-up of the truth. Woefully, Gambarini's appalling treatment never receives even a mention in the subsequent smoothing over of relations between Britain and France.

It is likely that, even without contending with marital abuse, Gambarini would have had to forgo her career after her wedding, as was the convention at the time. Now, with her abusive husband gone, she might have returned to composing and the stage, but it was not be. Just a few months later, she died giving birth to Chazell's baby daughter and London lost a pioneering, independent female voice.

One who wishes Gambarini's achievements to be given due recognition in the annals of 18th-century music is the Italian pianist Margherita Torretta, who has recently released a recording of her published keyboard works. 'Gambarini's absence from standard accounts of 18th-century music undervalues her role in the evolution of the Galant and early Classical style,' says Torretta, 'from her rejection of contrapuntal formulas and rigorous polyphony of Baroque composition to her invention of pleasing lyrical and dance-inspired melodies.

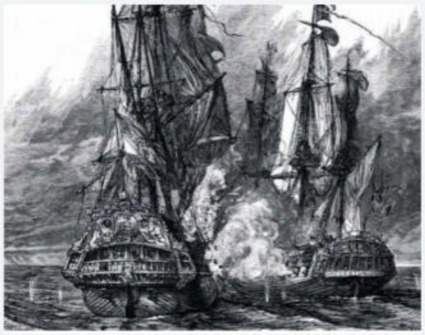
'Compared with the music of many better-known composers in this transitional era between the Baroque and the late-18th-century Classical period, Gambarini's compositions are exceptional for the clarity and gracefulness of their melodic lines and the effective, complementary nature of the bass lines accompanying them. These distinctive features, surely, were informed by her training as a professional singer. Her compositions are polished and elegant; her keyboard writing, though spare, unfolds with clear purpose, direction and effect.'

GAMBARINI Life&Times

1731

LIFE: Elisabetta de Gambarini is born on 7 September to Charles Gambarini, a counsellor to Frederick I of Sweden, and Giovanna Stradiotti, an opera singer.

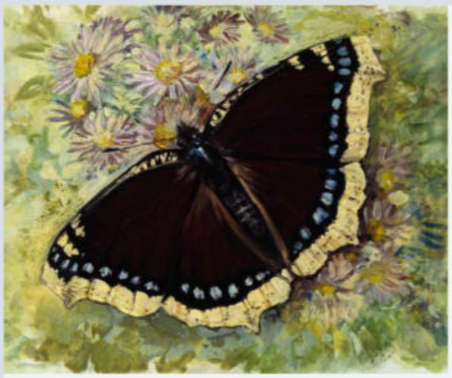
TIMES: Robert Jenkins, captain of the ship *Rebecca*, has his ear cut off by Spanish coastguards in Havana, Cuba. Years later, the incident will fuel the ***War of Jenkins' Ear*** between Britain and Spain.



1747

LIFE: A highly accomplished mezzo-soprano, she sings the part of Israelite Woman in the first performance of Handel's *Judas Maccabaeus* at the Royal Opera House.

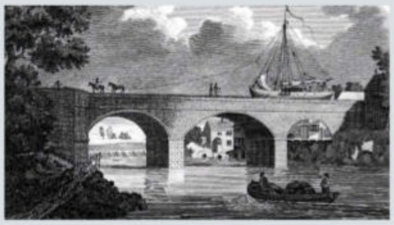
TIMES: Tried and convicted of high treason for his role in the Jacobite rising of 1745, Simon Fraser, 11th Lord Lovat, becomes the last person in Britain to be executed by beheading.



1761

LIFE: At a benefit concert at the Great Room, Dean Street, she performs one of her own odes alongside *The Enchanted Forest* by Francesco Geminiani, her former teacher.

TIMES: Masterminded by engineer James Brindley, the first section of the ***Bridgewater Canal*** opens between Worsley and Manchester, leading to a spate of 'canal mania'.



1765

LIFE: At just 33, she dies during childbirth on 9 February and is buried at St James Churchyard, Westminster.

TIMES: Johann Christian Bach and Carl Friedrich Abel launch the Bach-Abel concerts in London, giving performers and composers the chance to present their work to the paying public.

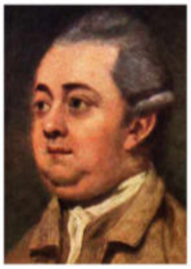
1748

LIFE: On 21 January, she publishes her Op. 1 *Six Sets of Lessons for the Harpsichord*, making her the first ever female composer in England to have her own keyboard music published.

TIMES: ***The Camberwell Beauty*** butterfly is given its name by English entomologist and author Moses Harris when he discovers two examples at Coldharbour Lane in the south of London.

1764

LIFE: Shortly after marrying Étienne Chazell, a senior employee of the French ambassador, she gives a performance as 'Mrs Chazell', making her last appearance as both a composer and organist.

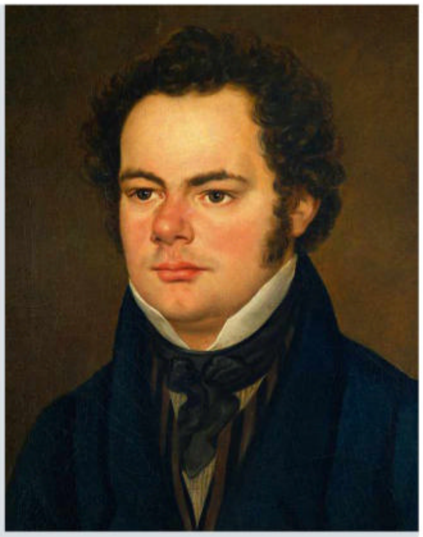


TIMES: During a visit to the ruins of the Capitol in Rome, English historian ***Edward Gibbon*** first conceives the idea of writing his *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

Franz Schubert

Die schöne Müllerin

Amanda Holloway is all ears as she listens to the best recordings of this set of songs detailing the doleful cycle of love, hope, rejection and despair



The composer

So prodigious was Schubert's talent that, at the time of *Die schöne Müllerin*, the 26 year-old's huge number of works already included masterpieces for performers ranging from solo voices and instruments to full orchestra. These included all but one of his symphonies, including the breezy Fifth and 'Unfinished' Eighth, and a wealth of highly polished quartets, piano sonatas and songs – though the likes of the 'Death and the Maiden' Quartet and *Winterreise* were still to come. While major opera success would elude him, his talent for writing for the voice was amply demonstrated elsewhere...

Building a Library is broadcast on Radio 3 at 3.30pm each Saturday as part of *Record Review*. A highlights podcast is available on BBC Sounds.

The work

By 1815, Schubert was proving himself to be an accomplished song composer, with *Gretchen am Spinnrade* (1814) followed by another setting of a poem by Goethe, the dramatic ballad *Erlkönig*. Far from a romantic figure himself (he was very short and round), the sensitive youth was drawn to themes of the early Romantic poets: the joy and pain of young love and the interaction between the human condition and the natural world. Schubert's two song cycles, *Die schöne Müllerin* (1823) and *Winterreise* (1827), both to texts by German poet Wilhelm Müller, have become the pinnacle of the Lieder repertoire.

'Imagine a man whose most brilliant hopes have perished,' wrote Schubert to a friend

The text of *Die schöne Müllerin* (The beautiful mill-maid) had its origin in a literary party game, or Liederspiel, that Müller attended in Berlin in 1816. Each guest created verse or music for their part in a familiar folk tale about a mill-maid and her suitors. The evening was especially charged because Müller (playing the miller lad) was in love with the 18-year-old Luise Hensel. Müller confided his passion to his diary over two years, but Luise had other suitors and didn't respond to his advances. He went abroad to forget her. In 1818, Müller revised his contributions to the Liederspiel as a monodrama and published it in an anthology, *77 Poems from the Posthumous Papers of a Travelling Horn-Player.*

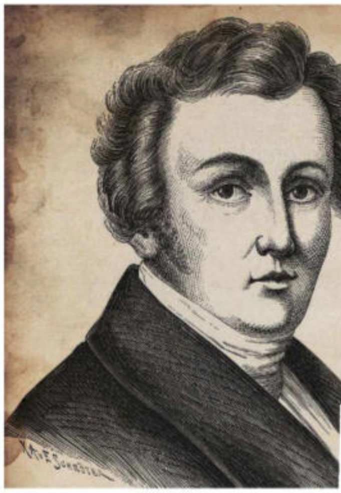
Müller's monodrama focusses on the journey from joy to despair of a naïve young miller lad who falls hopelessly in love with a mill-maid. He convinces himself that she loves him back, but when he discovers her with a lusty huntsman, he drowns himself in the brook. Schubert came across the cycle of poems at some point in 1823, and the theme of an erotic encounter leading to death might have seemed horribly prescient. Aged 25, he had just received a devastating diagnosis of syphilis, probably contracted from a sex worker during a night out with friends. The composer wrote to his friend Leopold Kupelwieser: 'I feel myself to be the most unhappy and wretched creature in the world. Imagine a man whose health will never be right again, a man whose most brilliant hopes have perished, to whom love and friendship have nothing to offer but pain, whose enthusiasm for all things beautiful is gone...'

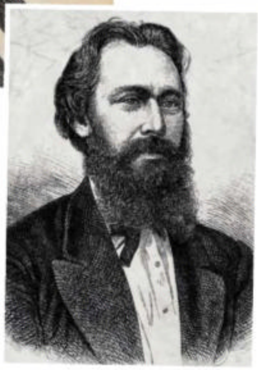
Schubert took 20 of Müller's 25 poems – omitting a Prologue, an Epilogue and three poems dotted through the cycle – for his setting, which was published as his Op. 25 by the Viennese firm Sauer & Leidesdorf in 1824. He dedicated the first edition to his friend the Baron von Schönstein, who had a lyrical high baritone voice, and who would later be credited with introducing Schubert's music to Liszt. The first performance of the complete cycle, however, was not until 1856 in the Musikverein, Vienna, by Julius Stockhausen. The German baritone was

Emotional encounter: baritone Matthias Goerne performs *Die schöne Müllerin* with pianist Christoph Eschenbach; (below centre) poet Wilhelm Müller; (below right) baritone Julius Christian Stockhausen championed the work

responsible for championing Schubert and *Die schöne Müllerin*, giving many performances of individual songs and complete cycles over the next decade. On 10 May 1860, he sang the complete cycle in the Musikverein, with the unset poems declaimed by the Viennese actress Julie Rettich, a friend of the Schumanns. More recently, the missing poems have also been included in recordings by singers including Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Christian Gerhaher and Ian Bostridge.

Schubert creates such variety in his settings, from simple strophic songs such as the jaunty, folkloric 'Das Wandern' (Wandering) to through-composed mini-dramas such as 'Am Feierabend' (At the end of the day), in which the lad imagines labouring in the noisy, clattering mill before enjoying calm, rest and a goodnight greeting from the mill-maid. Schubert's melodies, even when repeated, are flexible enough to allow plenty of vocal colouration – in the last stanza of 'Tränenregen' (Shower of tears), for instance, when his love suddenly abandons him, the key switches abruptly to the tonic minor. Schubert uses extremes of dynamic to convey the boy's sudden outbursts, from the phrase 'Dein ist mein Herz' (My heart is yours) in 'Ungeduld' (Impatience) to 'Mein!' (Mine!), a wild claim to possession of the mill-maid. Self-pity creeps in at the end of 'Morgengruss' (Morning greeting), and drenches 'Die liebe Farbe' (The favourite colour) in B minor with repeated F sharps sounding a death-toll. After a bitter reference to his rival, the hunter, in 'Die böse Farbe' (The loathsome colour), it's clear in 'Trockne Blumen' (Withered flowers) he is resolved to take his own life.





The lad's only confidante is the mill-stream that accompanies him on his journey, the piano supplying the water's rolling pulse throughout the cycle. The brook first appears in the second song, 'Wohin' (Whither) in rippling sextuplets. There's the mechanical churn of the mill wheel, the hunter's horn and the tolling death bell, all conjured in the piano line.

Finally, after a last exchange with his companion, the lad's voice goes silent and the brook, in low bass tones, seduces the lad into the water with a lullaby, 'Des Baches Wiegenlied' (The brook's lullaby). Schubert's plain setting of the last song gives singer and pianist space to paint a consolatory vision of death as eternal rest under a boundless sky.

GETTY

Turn the page to discover our recommended recordings of Schubert's Die schöne Müllerin

Supreme team: baritone Christian Gerhaher and pianist Gerold Huber work perfectly in sync

The best recording

Depth, insight and spontaneity

FRANZ SCHUBERT
DIE SCHÖNE MÜLLERIN
CHRISTIAN GERHAHER
GEROLD HUBER

Christian Gerhaher *(baritone)*
Gerold Huber *(piano)*
Sony Classical 88985427402

What makes a perfect *Die schöne Müllerin*? It has to be more than a beautiful voice (a matter of taste, after all) and a well-matched pianist. An exceptional performance takes us through every twist of the miller lad's emotional journey and leaves us changed. Christian Gerhaher and Gerold Huber, with their restrained, intimate performance, do just that. Gerhaher has taken masterclasses with Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, whose recordings of Schubert's two song cycles remain a yardstick. Their voices are not similar but they share a scrupulous attention to the delivery of text and music – Gerhaher's crisp rolled 'rrr' in 'Morgen' is a model of German diction. On this recording, Gerhaher inserts the missing Müller poems, his velvety, unemphatic speaking voice complementing the songs.

Gerhaher considers the coloration of every note, but the effect is never precious

Gerhaher and Huber's 2018 recording came 15 years after their first. They have honed their interpretation, adding insight and depth without losing the spontaneity. Gerhaher's mature baritone (he was nearly 50 at the time of the recording) sounds remarkably fresh – smoother and more controlled than in the earlier version. He is a cerebral artist, considering the coloration of every note, every nuance of pace and dynamic, but the effect is never precious. He doesn't do carefree optimism, though in 'Neugierige' (The curious one) he finds a tenorial simplicity and sweetness. Instead he excels in unease – you can hear the frown in his voice.

The quiet intensity of 'Die liebe Farbe', one of the most beautiful melodies in the cycle, is achieved with great economy, while the quiet fury of 'Der Jäger' (The hunter) and the menace of 'Eifersucht und Stolz' (Jealousy and pride) are never over-egged. Gerhaher can also reduce his light baritone to a gentle whisper, as in 'Trockne Blumen', with slow, affectless, detached phrases, while Huber bleaches

Three other great recordings

musique d'abord
SCHUBERT
Die schöne Müllerin

Werner Güra (tenor)
Of the countless recordings by fine tenor voices, the one I could live with forever is Güra and pianist Jan Schultsz's from 2007. Güra's bright, youthful tenor conveys all the subtle changes of mood, from innocent joy, through plaintive self-pity to jealous fury. Schultsz's tinny, Sunday-school piano propels the mill wheel, the splashing of the brook and the mocking horn calls. Güra offers deeper psychological insight than the fresh-voiced Fritz Wunderlich (1966) and more colours than the ardent, boyish Ian Bostridge (1995). *(Harmonia Mundi HMA1951708)*

Die schöne Müllerin

Julian Prégardien (tenor)
Alongside Kristian Bezuidenhout on a Graf-style fortepiano that is clipped and percussive – perfect for the mill-wheel, and full of resonance – Prégardien has a honeyed, flexible tenor, though purists may quibble with his lavish ornamentation. He seems to be making it up as he goes along, which can be exciting. Sometimes his urgency teeters on the hysterical, but he can hollow out his tone to chilling effect, and Bezuidenhout matches him with breathtaking *pianissimos*. *(Harmonia Mundi HMM902739)*

out the piano's tone. In 'Halt!' (Stop!), Huber conjures the sound of the roaring mill wheel with bass notes that surge and bubble to the surface. The integration of singer and pianist is complete – their ebb and flow perfectly in sync.

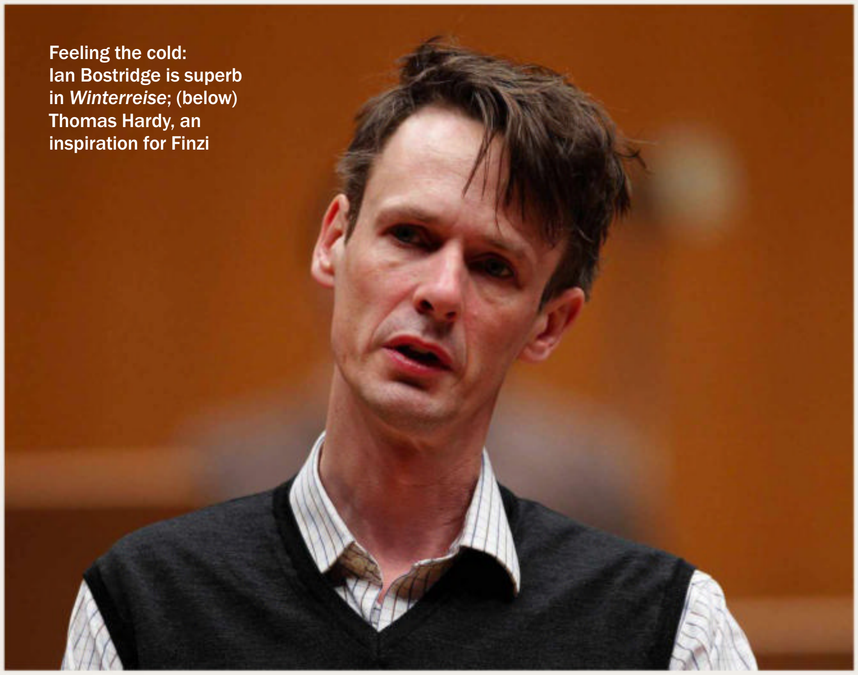
The final 'Des Baches Wiegenlied' is almost conversational and achingly tender. Gerhaher seduces the unhappy youth with visions of a soft pillow in a blue crystal chamber, making death seem sweet and inevitable, and Huber allows the last notes to subside gently into silence. The recording quality is admirable – it's like having a front row seat at Wigmore Hall.

Matthias Goerne (baritone)

In the pantheon of baritone recordings, the legendary Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau has long been considered the benchmark. His is a beautiful voice, but it doesn't have rough edges that snag you like Matthias Goerne's does here. With his granite baritone, Goerne could never be mistaken for a naïve miller's lad, but his intense portrayal of a mind unravelling is compelling. You may start by resisting the heavy tread of 'Das Wandern' but soon you are enfolded into his dark, velvet-edged vision, supported by pianist Christoph Eschenbach. One quibble? Goerne's breathing is occasionally too audible in the spacy acoustic. *(Harmonia Mundi HMC901995)*

And one to avoid...

In 2009, the young German operatic tenor Jonas Kaufmann was becoming a worldwide sensation. And when he recorded his first *Die schöne Müllerin* with the experienced pianist Helmut Deutsch, it was greatly anticipated. That glorious voice as Schubert's lovesick lad? Why not? Sadly, Kaufmann is not on top form here: his performance is, frankly, a bit dull and one-note; it is gusty and unfocussed. Deutsch does his best to support, but he can't inject the missing energy, even in a live recording from Munich's Max-Joseph Saal.



Feeling the cold: Ian Bostridge is superb in *Winterreise*; (below) Thomas Hardy, an inspiration for Finzi

Continue the journey...

We suggest five works to explore after Schubert's Die schöne Müllerin

As he moved on to his next great song cycle, **Schubert** stuck with the same poet, Wilhelm Müller, but went for a change of scenery – in contrast to the babbling brook of *Die schöne Müllerin*, a snowy landscape is the backdrop for *Winterreise*'s tale of rejection, loneliness and misery. As our protagonist wends his chilly way, his trudge is, at least, accompanied by some truly vivid scene-painting. **(Ian Bostridge (tenor), Thomas Adès (piano)** *Pentatone PTC5186764*)

Moping from a distance is also at the heart of *An die ferne Geliebte*, **Beethoven**'s seminal song cycle of 1816. And it really is a cycle – unlike *Die schöne Müllerin* and *Winterreise*, whose action moves from A to B, Beethoven returns us at the end of his six songs to where we began. That said, the texts, by the physician Alois Jeitteles, give a similar message: unrequited love is wretched. **(Werner Güra (tenor), Christoph Berner (fortepiano)** *Harmonia Mundi HMC902217*)

Robert Schumann takes the water feature up a notch from *Die schöne Müllerin*'s brook when he references the Rhine in his *Dichterliebe* cycle. Setting texts by Heinrich Heine, the work is rich in imagery and metaphor – from jewels, flowers and musical instruments to rolling rivers – as the joys and woes of love are set out over 16 songs. **(Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau (baritone), Gerald Moore (piano)** *Orfeo C294921*)

Like *Winterreise*, **Mahler**'s 1880s *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* (Songs of a wayfarer) also features an itinerant narrator. As might be expected from a composer who was experiencing the pain of romance for himself, three of the four songs mourn the dismal fate of the rejected, though at the end there's a hint that life is not entirely doom and gloom. **(Alice Coote (mezzo); Netherlands PO/Marc Albrecht** *Pentatone PTC5186576*)

To plumb the depths of despair, who better to turn to than Thomas Hardy?

To plumb the depths of despair, who better to turn to than the famously morose Thomas Hardy? This is what ***Gerald Finzi*** did, setting Hardy's poems in *By Footpath and Stile*, his 1922 cycle for voice and string quartet that tackles subjects such as separation and death over six songs. Finzi didn't like his efforts, and later removed the work from publication, but posterity has since taken a more positive view. **(Roderick Williams (baritone); Sacconi Quartet** *Naxos 8557963*)

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Reviews

Recordings and books rated by expert critics

Welcome

Who would have thought we'd be hearing premiere recordings of unheard music by Mozart and Chopin? The discovery of long lost works by both composers within months of each other certainly made headlines, and Deutsche Grammophon were quick off the mark to record them. Both have been placed before our reviewers this issue, so read on to see if they are worthy revelations or whether, perhaps, they should have been left to gather dust.

For those of you hungry for actual new music, there's plenty to entice in the following pages, including a new opera by Kate Soper, choral works by Matthew Martin and Yves Castagnet, plus orchestral offerings by John Luther Adams and Christopher Tyler Nickel. Happy New Year!

Michael Beek *Reviews editor*

This month's critics

John Allison, Nicholas Anderson, Terry Blain, Kate Bolton-Porciatti, Geoff Brown, Michael Church, Christopher Cook, Martin Cotton, Christopher Dingle, Misha Donat, Jessica Duchen, Rebecca Franks, George Hall, Malcolm Hayes, Michael Jameson, Berta Joncus, John-Pierre Joyce, Nicholas Kenyon, Ashutosh Khandekar, Erik Levi, Natasha Loges, Andrew McGregor, David Nice, Freya Parr, Ingrid Pearson, Jeremy Pound, Steph Power, Anthony Pryer, Paul Riley, Suzanne Rolt, Jan Smaczny, Jo Talbot, Anne Templer, Kate Wakeling, Alexandra Wilson, Barry Witherden

KEY TO STAR RATINGS

★★★★★	Outstanding
★★★★	Excellent
★★★	Good
★★	Disappointing
★	Poor

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Peerless pianism from Alexandre Kantorow

The outstanding French pianist makes light work of Brahms and Schubert in this exhilarating show, says *Jessica Duchen*

ALEXANDRE KANTOROW
BRAHMS · SCHUBERT

Brahms • Schubert

Brahms: Piano Sonata No. 1 in C major, Op. 1; **Schubert (Trans. Liszt):** Song Transcriptions – Der Wanderer; Der Müller und der Bach; Frühlingsglaube; Die Stadt; Am Meer; **Schubert:** Fantasy in C major 'Wanderer Fantasy', D760
Alexandre Kantorow (piano)
BIS BIS-2660 (CD/SACD)
72:44 mins

We don't know exactly which of his own pieces the 20-year-old Brahms played to the Schumanns the first time he visited them. There's a good chance, however, that he included the C major Piano Sonata. It became his Op. 1 and may have been chosen for the purpose with their advice. As Alexandre Kantorow plays it, you can well imagine the astounded Robert stopping him and rushing to fetch Clara.

Kantorow has already recorded the other two Brahms sonatas, but this is the only one of his series to draw in another romantic composer. Schubert is a perfect choice, since Brahms, along with Schumann, played an important role in their unfortunate predecessor's posthumous rehabilitation. Schumann had visited Schubert's brother Ferdinand in Vienna and found in his home manuscript treasures galore, including the Ninth Symphony. Brahms then edited some of the piano works for publication, taking no printed credit. The C major Piano Sonata has much in common with Schubert's 'Wanderer Fantasy' – cyclic themes, a set of variations on a song etc – and they prove to be fine companion pieces.

One critic has called Kantorow 'Liszt reincarnated', but equally he might be the image of the young Brahms. First, you can take his peerless technical ability for granted. Next, he is blessed with a remarkable personal sound:

BBC music MAGAZINE CHOICE

Keyboard poet: Alexandre Kantorow has a remarkable sound all of his own

it has the quality of a dark, warm roar from deep within the instrument, huge, highly coloured, but never harsh or ugly. There's a hint of 'golden age' imaginative freedom in his singerly phrasing, allowing steady accompaniments to support the liberated voice. And there's a certain innocence, too, about his take on this repertoire: as if he has stripped away the intervening centuries of cynicism to restore the music to its untainted, youthful ardour.

The Brahms sonata's first movement is full of ideally articulated light and shade, the harmonies deeply felt, the melodies shaped and coloured with both spontaneity and care. In the slow movement's variations, each fresh thought adds another layer of magic. The scherzo and finale bound forward with headlong, exhilarating momentum, yet the colour and the detail is never sacrificed to sheer speed. I've not heard such a magnificent recording of it since Krystian Zimerman's from 1980 (which was never issued on CD).

The Schubert-Liszt song transcriptions are all related to the idea of the Wanderer, as curtain-raiser to the Fantasy. Kantorow delves deep into the gothic darkness of 'Die Stadt' and 'Am Meer', his sound ideally creating the atmosphere. 'Der Müller und der Bach' is phrased with declamatory freedom and fantasy, as is 'Frühlingsglaube', where Kantorow passes silky legato between the registers and fills the textures with exquisitely gradated points of light.

Finally, a positively stupendous performance of the 'Wanderer Fantasy' crowns the album. Kantorow makes light of the piece's notorious challenges, giving it lashings of sweep, swagger and poetic urgency. The central section takes the idea of foreboding and obsession to new levels, before the triumphant scherzo, fugue and coda wrap the Wanderer theme up in glittering cascades of starshine.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Kantorow's 'Wanderer Fantasy' is the album's positively stupendous crowning glory

Performer's notes
Alexandre Kantorow

Why did you pair this Brahms sonata with Schubert?
Brahms's First Sonata and Schubert's 'Wanderer Fantasy' have at their heart a lieder theme in the slow movement, and the other movements are rhythmically connected, so I felt there were many musical ideas that link the pieces together. I also felt it was important to show that while Brahms has a very youthful approach, it's still a 'Classical' sonata, and so even though the Schubert came before, it felt more advanced, musically.

What challenges does the 'Wanderer Fantasy' pose?
Oh there are big challenges, especially in technique – pieces like that are not written in a very natural way for the hands; it's much less natural than Chopin, who understood the smooth accompaniments, the right-hand virtuosity and the positions of the hands. Schubert doesn't care; he had his ideas and crammed them into the piece, and it has to sound elegant, easy and beautiful. There are moments where you stay on the same harmony for at least 20 seconds. It's hard not to get submerged by the time you have to take.

How do you develop your own sound as a pianist?
On the piano you don't have so many variables, compared to something like the cello or the voice. We really only have attack, time and use of the pedal to create these waves of resonances, and so all the possibilities come from the amount of attack and amount of time you can take. I try to feel the sound as long as possible, to really hear the sound die before the next note.

GETTY, SASHA GUSOV

Orchestral

ORCHESTRAL CHOICE

A humbling perspective on our planet's endurance

Rebecca Franks is awed by John Luther Adams's immersive new work with Earth's timeline at its heart

Primeval power: Delta David Gier conducts excellent South Dakota players

John Luther Adams

An Atlas of Deep Time

South Dakota Symphony Orchestra/Delta David Gier

Cantaloupe CA21199 41:57 mins

An Atlas of Deep Time might just be John Luther Adams's best work since his Pulitzer-Prize-winning *Become Ocean* of 2013. Like that piece, this latest orchestral epic takes our planet as its subject, listening and looking far beyond the small speck that humanity plays in its history. Across a sweeping 42-minute panorama, he explores the idea of deep time, of an Earth that is 4 billion, 570 million years old. By his maths, 'the entire history of the human family is represented in the dying reverberations of the last 25 milliseconds of this music' (a high, ethereal tapering off the violins).

> This music reminds us of the majesty of the Earth and the sheer depth of time

A humbling perspective, for sure, and one backed up by the sense of awe created by the music. If *Become Ocean*'s orchestral palette was aquatic, *An Atlas of Deep Time* is hewn from the earth, regularly punctuated with cascades of drums and striding piano that root and energise the music. An expansive space opens up at the start, rising up from the bottom of the orchestra, as if we are climbing through some vast canyon, ready to be overwhelmed by the natural world.

Adding to that effect is the immersive nature of the writing, with the instruments grouped into six 'choirs' (*Become Ocean* had three) and six simultaneous tempos. Reports of the premiere in 2022 by the South Dakota Symphony Orchestra, who play excellently on this recording under Delta David Gier, suggest that it was hard to find the ideal space to appreciate them all. That's resolved here. The music surges and subsides with primeval power, mixing terror, awe and beauty – and it repays repeated listening, with new aspects revealing themselves each time.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

RECORDING ★★★★★

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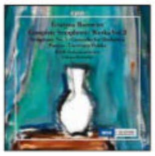
Bacewicz

Symphony No. 1; Concerto for Orchestra; Uwertura Polska etc

WDR Sinfonieorchester/
Łukasz Borowicz

CPO 555661-2 74:59 mins



The third and final volume of this recorded survey of Grażyna Bacewicz's symphonic output showcases music from right across her creative life. An outstanding figure who has re-emerged in recent years as one of 20th-century Poland's most significant composers, Bacewicz wrote much more than three albums' worth of music with orchestra – she was especially prolific in the concerto form. In terms of purely symphonic pieces, this new release fills a gap in our knowledge with the world-premiere recording of the Symphony No. 1, written during World War Two. Conceived in classic four-movement structure, it gets off to a moody start before picking up rhythmic drive. The whole work sounds arresting thanks to excellent playing from the Cologne orchestra under a devoted champion of much Polish music, Łukasz Borowicz, who also supplies his own programme notes.

Moving through the years of socialist realism, it's clear how Bacewicz circumvented many strictures while still having something fresh to say, as in the *Uwertura Polska* (1954), with its irregular and restless 5/8 writing; though it sounds folksy in a sense, that time signature is not a feature of Polish folk music. In a more intermediate work, the *Partita for Orchestra* of 1955, Borowicz and his players sweep through the four movements impressively, via the frozen sounds of the *Intermezzo* to the dancing *oberek* of the finale.

From her later 'sonorist' period, replacing the earlier neo-classicism, the Concerto for Large Symphony Orchestra (1962) is far from conventional, despite its four movements. This performance shows it to be one of her masterpieces, a description that also applies to the short *In una parte*, composed in 1967 two years before her premature death. *John Allison*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★

RECORDING ★★★★

Berlioz

Symphonie fantastique

The Cleveland Orchestra/Franz Welser-Möst

Cleveland TCO0013 (digital) 49:43 mins

BERLIOZ
THE CLEVELAND ORCHESTRA
WELSER-MÖST

No two temperaments could be less alike than those of Hector Berlioz and Franz Welser-Möst. The composer could be objective about his wild mood swings, his excessive vitality; the conductor's ability to overview detail is an asset, but Alpine ice and water seem to flow in his veins, not blood. To press into service the title of the *Symphonie fantastique*'s first movement, there are dreams here but no real passions. All dynamics are carefully observed, which makes for a good start, but the *idée fixe* of the protagonist's capricious beloved isn't vocal enough – at least we get the repeat – and once the mania sets in, it all stays too careful. The waltz has no space, moving along in an overheated ballroom at a pace which only suits the manic coda, though there are tonal beauties in the 'Scene in the fields'.

The last two movements put this contender beyond the pale. The Cleveland brass adopt the maxim 'never play louder than lovely', which is beside the point for the brassy band dictating the 'March to the Scaffold' and the deliberate vulgarities of the 'Witches' Sabbath'. The distortion of the once-ideal beloved's theme is disarmingly polite; the assembled company proceed to dance to what sound like German folk tunes. The wilder Berlioz gets, the prissier the performance. Sound is gloriously natural, with a rich bass that highlights the idiosyncrasy of the rhythms, and the bass drum does sound a note of terror near the end. But it's not enough. *David Nice*

PERFORMANCE ★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Dvořák

Legends; Slavonic Rhapsodies

Czech Philharmonic/Tomáš Netopil

Pentatone PTC 5187 221 80:35 mins

Dvořák Legends & Rhapsodies
Czech Philharmonic
Tomáš Netopil

While listening to this generously filled album, I couldn't help wondering whether we tend to take far too much of Dvořák's music for granted. Consider the *Legends* for example. The ten pieces that make up this infinitely varied cycle were originally conceived for piano duet and later recast in orchestral garb, as performed here. If you are familiar with the piano duet version, the sheer diversity of textures and imaginative sonorities conjured up by the composer in its orchestral form are nothing short of miraculous. As the critic Eduard Hanslick aptly put it, this music not only exudes a 'sense of immediacy', and 'wholesome freshness', but also displays an unparalleled mastery of melodic, harmonic and contrapuntal art.

Tomáš Netopil and the Czech Philharmonic deliver a relatively straightforward yet immensely appealing account of the *Legends*, emphasising the chamber-music-like intimacy of Dvořák's writing and avoiding unnecessary exaggerations of gesture. Pentatone's richly resonant recording, recalling the classic sound of the orchestra on those old Supraphon discs of the 1960s, gives prominence to the distinctively nutty and bucolic sound of the woodwind, but retains sufficient clarity for us to savour all the subtleties of the orchestration.

The *Three Slavonic Rhapsodies* also form a cycle of contrasting moods, ranging from pastoral lyricism in the first and dramatic intensity in the second to exuberant joy in the third. Once again, Netopil adopts a relatively measured approach that nonetheless revels in the spontaneity and melodic ingenuity of Dvořák's invention. Admittedly, there are moments where Netopil could perhaps be a bit more unbuttoned and drive the music with even greater fervour. But this is a relatively minor issue given that the album as a whole is a sheer delight from start to finish. *Erik Levi*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Polish pride: Łukasz Borowicz has long championed Grażyna Bacewicz

KSAWERY ZAMOYSKI

Mendelssohn

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Le Concert des Nations; Le Capella Nacional de Catalunya/Jordi Savall et al

Alia Vox AVSA9960 245:57 mins (4CD)

This extraordinary project from Jordi Savall spares no effort to bring us *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as Felix Mendelssohn fashioned it. It demonstrates how the incidental music interacts with parts of Shakespeare's play, including numerous musical snippets absent from the concert version, many of which underpin extracts of text.

The four discs offer the whole thing twice, respectively in English and German, each also with a disc of the concert suite (these are duplicates), and the lavish booklet is full of interesting essays. Putting the familiar pieces into context sheds valuable light: for instance, the *Intermezzo*, played after Hermia finds herself alone in the forest, unmistakably includes her call of Lysander's name.

There's quite a jolt as our 21st-century preoccupations collapse and we whoosh back to the 1840s. The period performance has ups and downs; there's a certain heavy-handedness in the conducting, which sometimes feels excessively tied to the barlines, though the orchestra has a pleasing clarity of texture. The strings are thin and the natural horns lurch, making the *Nocturne* sound more demanding than usual.

As for the actors, a wonderfully bossy play-directing session from Quince made me smile, but the English version sometimes sounds howly vowely, Bottom's donkey braying is overdone and the acoustic is atrociously over-resonant for both English and German versions, though they were recorded in different venues.

It's not ideal. And yet… the sense that we are back in Mendelssohn's day, hearing it all for the first time, is magical. The music's sense of struggle and the text's slight am-dram quality conspire to add to an atmosphere of another age. Is this genuinely Mendelssohn's Shakespeare? Quite possibly. *Jessica Duchen*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★

Ries

Symphonies Nos 4 & 5

Tapiola Sinfonietta/Janne Nisonen

Ondine ODE 1454-2 59:06 mins

FERDINAND RIES

Ferdinand Ries is not a name to conjure with, but in his day (1784-1838) he was celebrated both as a pianist and as a composer. He was the most famous in a long line of musical Ries's which included his violinist father Franz, who taught Beethoven, who in return helped the young Ferdinand start his career. He spent three years in Vienna being taught the piano by Beethoven, and officiating as the composer's secretary and copyist; disobeying Beethoven's instructions and inserting a cadenza of his own into a performance of Beethoven's C minor concerto, he actually earned the master's praise.

Ries narrowly escaped conscription into the French army thanks to having lost an eye from smallpox as a child; touring all over Europe as a pianist, he washed up in London, where he found success as a symphonist and as a prolific composer of chamber music. The *Grove* dictionary quotes a 'probably apocryphal' remark by Beethoven to the effect that Ries 'imitates me too much'.

That story sounds plausible because the symphonies under review inhabit a quintessentially Beethovenian soundworld. It's clear from both works that Ries liked to make his audience jump to attention at the start. Symphony No. 4 in F major begins with *staccato fortissimo* chords in a series of unexpected keys, followed by meditative passages, then settling into a world of snarling brass. Moreover, once into his stride, his music is full of Beethovenian effects and gestures. The *Andantino* breathes the same atmosphere as Beethoven's Sixth Symphony, and there are moments when the *Scherzo* has echoes of Beethoven's Fifth.

With Ries's Fifth Symphony the story is the same. But so what? He was a masterly orchestrator, and as a result – as passionately played by the Tapiola Sinfonietta, under Janne Nisonen's direction – these skilfully-crafted works emerge as noble rediscoveries. *Michael Church*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Ries rediscoveries: Janne Nisonen conducts rarely heard symphonies

IDA NISONEN

Tchaikovsky

Sleeping Beauty
Philharmonia Orchestra/
Santtu-Matias Rouvali
Philharmonia Records SIGCD928 (digital) 33:55 mins

Santtu-Matias Rouvali can certainly draw lustrous sounds from his Philharmonia players. On the intelligent programming front, though, he's not done too well so far. A bizarre decision to end an advertised 'complete' Stravinsky *Petrushka* before the death of the puppet and his ghost appearance, and this opportunity to show a personal love and knowledge of Tchaikovsky's three-hour ballet cornucopia, what Stravinsky called his 'chef d'oeuvre', is squandered. True, the selection is a thankless 32 minutes long, but in addition to the numbers of the five-movement suite, there's no inkling of the inventive orchestration which informs so many of the *divertissement* numbers. It was bad planning to follow the *Rose Adagio* with the Act 2 'Vision' *Pas de deux*, an *Andante cantabile* so close to the Fifth Symphony's slow movement. The cello solo is wonderfully subtle, though, and this is the most successful movement.

Otherwise, tempos rarely feel quite the ideal, though – Carabosse's evil needs to spit more fire, the Waltz is just that bit too fast and the decision to end with a very slow, aggrandised apotheosis, where the court homage Aurora and Desire to the French tune 'Vive Henri IV', might have worked at the end of the complete ballet. The sound is surprisingly dull at times, with the trumpet in the Act One version of the Lilac Fairy's music failing to cut through, though woodwind solos and ensembles are distinguished. As a sequence, though, this just isn't enough. *David Nice*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Verdi

Complete Ballet Music
Munich Radio Orchestra/
Ivan Repušić
BR Klassik 900341 117:39 mins (2CD)

With one exception – *Aida*, written for Cairo in 1871 – all Verdi's ballet music was composed for productions of his operas in Paris, where audiences expected a danced *divertissement* as part of the overall experience. In two instances – *Les vêpres siciliennes* (1855) and *Don Carlos* (1867) – these were works conceived for the Parisian stage; in others a ballet sequence was added for a French production of an Italian work – newly minted for *Jérusalem* (the Paris revision of *I Lombardi*, 1847), *Le Trouvère* (revision of *Il trovatore*, 1857), *Macbeth* (1865) and *Otello* (1894, the last stage music Verdi composed.) Many of these are superior examples of their kind.

Jérusalem is perhaps the most conventional in design. With its solemnity and strange harmonic progressions, the *Macbeth* sequence gives some sense of the action of Shakespeare's Hecate scenes, involving the witches – though its ending is abrupt as the scene moves on to something else. The *divertissement* from *Le Trouvère* is unusual in using thematic material related to an element of the opera – the gypsies' Anvil Chorus.

At some 30 and 16 minutes long respectively, the *Vêpres siciliennes* and *Don Carlos* sequences, entitled *Les Quatre Saisons* and *La Peregrina*, are the grandest and most substantial. Much more closely integrated into the action, and the only Verdian ballet regularly performed in stage productions, the *Aida* sequence consists of three separate movements. Choral parts, though, are not included.

The frank exoticism of the *Otello* sequence – with its *Danse turque*, *Chanson arabe* and *Chanson grecque*, make it an attractive concert suite and well worth getting to know.

There's a high standard of playing in these keenly focused, rhythmically taut performances. *George Hall*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Venezuela!

– Music from the Americas I

Works by Plaza, Castellanos, Carreño, Estéves, Hung
Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra/Domingo Hindoyan
Onyx ONYX4251 66:24 mins

Since taking the helm of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra as chief conductor in 2021, Domingo Hindoyan has been gradually introducing British audiences to the lesser-heard works of Latin American composers. Their latest release brings us closer to the music of his native Venezuela, the first volume in a series dedicated to music from the Americas. While the composers' names will be new to many of us, these works evoke different aspects of Venezuelan landscapes, painting rich images through lush, romantic, mostly tonal orchestration.

Two of the works here are by Evencio Castellanos, both showcasing the full breadth of the orchestra's tone colours, as melodies are passed cleverly between different instrumental groups. *Santa Cruz de Pacairigua* imagines people dancing in front of the Church of the Holy Cross, a vibrant fiesta of Latin rhythms with a dramatic flourish to finish, giving way to the mournful opening of Carreño's *Margariteña*, which takes us to the island of Margarita with a Venezuelan folk melody that becomes grander and more majestic as it evolves.

There's plenty to enjoy in the lush orchestration and atmospheric string writing of Juan Bautista Plaza's *Vigilia*, and in Estévez's depiction of the midday horizon in *Mediodía en el Llano*, both of which are ballet-like in their storytelling. Completing the full span of the 20th century, the final track brings us up to 2004 with Yuri Hung's *Kanaima*, which sees a fast-paced, rhythmic melody passed from marimba to strings. *Freya Parr*

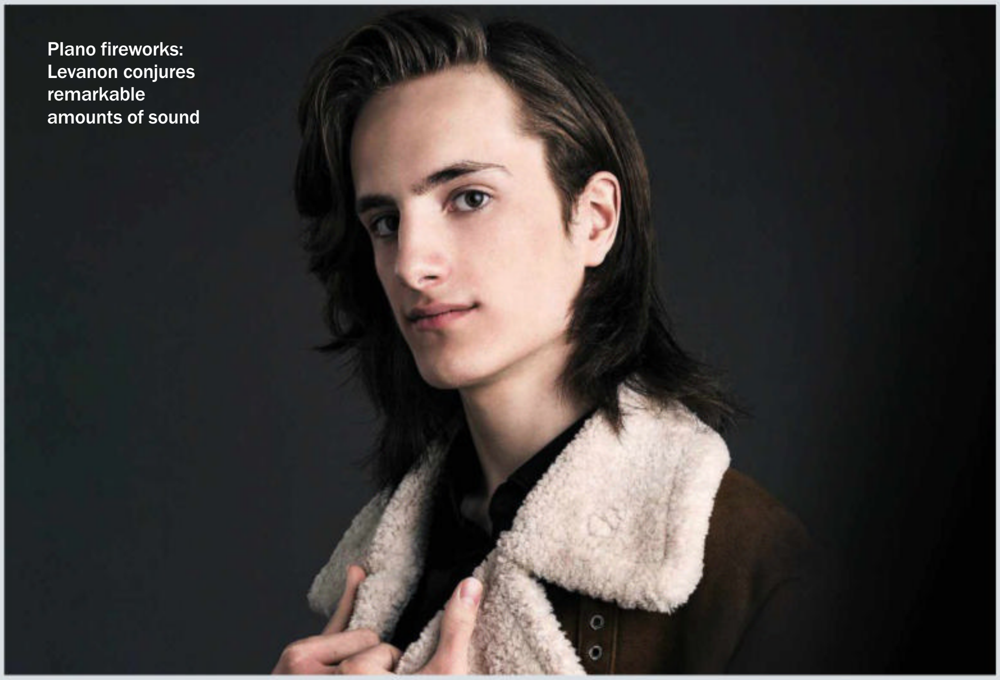
PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

CONCERTO CHOICE

LISZT
Piano Concertos Nos. 1 & 2 · Totentanz
YOAV LEVANON
Luzerner Sinfonieorchester · Michael Sanderling

Yoav Levanon's Liszt is an intense and thrilling ride

The young Israeli-French pianist goes all in with this sparkling and dramatic display, says ***Rebecca Franks***



Piano fireworks: Levanon conjures remarkable amounts of sound

NIR SLAKMAN

Liszt

Piano Concertos Nos 1 & 2; Totentanz
Yoav Levanon (piano); Luzerner Sinfonieorchester/ Michael Sanderling
Warner Classics 2173242397 64:46 mins

Yoav Levanon goes all in with Liszt for his first concerto album, recorded as part of the 2024 KlavierFestival 'Le piano symphonique' in Lucerne. The 20-year-old Israeli-French pianist is one of the latest generation of pianists who can generate remarkable amounts of sound from a keyboard, and boy does he unleash demons in Liszt's First Piano Concerto.

> The *Totentanz* is devilish and relentless, but Levanon has fun with it

Thunderous, *grandioso* chords, splendid double octaves, dramatic flourishes, a theatrical spirit and passionate melody means the first movement is over in a flash. A Beethovenian spirit lingers in the *Quasi Adagio*, which moves from hymn to nocturne to tempest. Levanon is all quicksilver in the third movement, with its precise silvery triangle, and he has the requisite rhythmic attack of the *Allegro marziale animato*, giving us a thrilling race to the end.

If the Second Concerto begins more sedately and serenely, with room for Levanon to show off sparkling playing, intertwined with soloists from the orchestra, we're soon back in tumultuous territory, which everyone involved relishes. The duetting between solo cello (and later oboe and flute) and piano in the *Allegro moderato* is beautiful and offers much needed respite before the drama ratchets up again. There's more space in this concerto for the orchestra to shine too, but Levanon doesn't yet give us the sense of overall architecture.

All signs of Lisztian restraint are ditched in a *Totentanz* that's almost cartoonish in its devilishness and exhausting in its relentlessness, but Levanon has fun with it. Three solo pieces offer welcome respite at the end of an intense programme.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

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Bartók • Rózsa

Bartók: Violin Concerto No. 2*; **Rózsa:** Violin Concerto**
Roman Simovic (violin); London Symphony Orchestra/*Kevin John Edusei; **Simon Rattle
LSO Live LSO0886 73:28 mins

LSO London Symphony Orchestra
RÓZSA
BARTÓK
25

Miklos Rózsa entitled his autobiography *Double Life*. That was in reference not only to his Oscar-winning score for the 1947 film of that title in which Ronald Coleman plays an actor whose own life is tragically invaded by his on-stage portrayal of Othello, but also to the firm distinction Rózsa made between his activities in Hollywood and his career as a composer of 'serious' concert music. All the same, he allowed himself to be persuaded to adapt parts of the Violin Concerto he wrote in 1953 so they could be used in Billy Wilder's affectionate spoof *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*. Appropriately enough for a piece composed for Jascha Heifetz, the concerto is a real virtuoso vehicle in which the soloist scarcely pauses to draw breath for an instant, particularly in its somewhat frenetic finale. The music is scored with consummate skill throughout, though it's no use expecting the same level of refinement and intellectual rigour we find in the Violin Concerto No. 2 by Rózsa's fellow-Hungarian Bartók.

Roman Simovic, the London Symphony Orchestra's leader, plays both concertos with great panache where needed, also finding just the right degree of warmth and rhythmic flexibility in the variation slow movement of the Bartók. His recordings on the LSO's in-house label include the complete solo *Caprices* by Paganini, so the technical demands of these concertos hold no terrors for him. His account of the Rózsa may lack that final ounce of urgency conveyed by Heifetz in his famous recording with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, but it's impressive nevertheless. Simon Rattle provides incisive support in the Rózsa, as does Kevin John Edusei in the Bartók, and the recording is first-rate.
Misha Donat

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Beethoven

Piano Concertos

Alexander Lonquich (piano);
Munich Chamber Orchestra
ECM 4876904 174:19 mins (3CD)

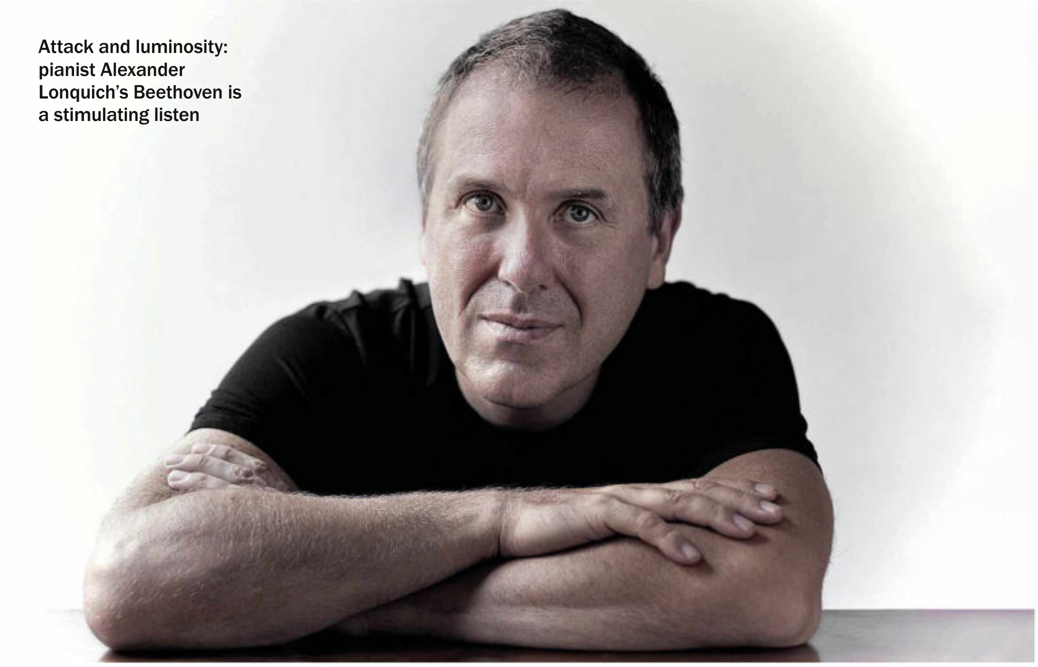
There's a high bar for any new recording of all five Beethoven piano concertos, considering that we have fine accounts by Paul Lewis, Leif Ove Andsnes, Pierre-Laurent Aimard and many more further back. But Alexander Lonquich makes a good case in his note for these five great works as demonstrating a concentrated development of Beethoven's idiom over two decades. He uses a modern piano, very brightly recorded, does not essay any continuo playing, and works with a chamber orchestra of 22 string players.

As he develops the rhetoric from No. 2 to the 'Emperor', No. 5, the overriding impression is of immediacy of attack from both pianist and orchestra, sometimes quite jumpy, almost manic; but shading into poised playing in the quieter sections. There are crystal-clear lines in the first movement of No. 2 and the bar 149 shift of harmony is beautifully captured. Though the second movement feels a notch too slow, the third is sparklingly bouncy. The off-beat rhythms of No. 1's finale are punched out a touch too seriously.

The first movement of No. 4 unfolds with suppressed brooding from the piano's first spread chord, though something odd happens at bar 68 with a seemingly unresolved harmony. Lonquich manages Beethoven's tricky pedal markings well, but allows the short last chords of this movement to resonate beyond the orchestra's. After a sturdy but unrelenting opening movement to the 'Emperor', there's a real success in the *Adagio un poco mosso*, flowing well with luminous piano sound.

Not everything here will please, but the music-making is always stimulating. *Nicholas Kenyon*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★



Attack and luminosity: pianist Alexander Lonquich's Beethoven is a stimulating listen

FRANCESCO FRATTO

Mozart

Piano Concertos Nos 20 & 23

Khatia Buniatishvili (piano);
Academy of St Martin in the Fields
Sony Classical 19802809282 68:23 mins

Khatia Buniatishvili, despite having begun her career in an impressive way, has been unforgivably trolled for her very visual marketing over the years. Still, all that should count is the musical result – and especially in two of Mozart's most popular and often recorded piano concertos.

The Georgian pianist directs the Academy of St-Martin-in-the-Fields from the piano and the orchestra plays excellently, with unaffected gusto and passion. Buniatishvili chiefly picks convincing tempos, although the second movement of K488 is slightly sluggish, and the coordination between piano and orchestra mostly works. A couple of near-misses should perhaps have been edited to better effect, but recorded sound quality is favourable.

There is no doubting Buniatishvili's genuine feeling for the music, but she falls into some unfortunate traps, notably the fits and starts in both her dynamics and her rhythmic sense. For instance, she often plays with a half-lit sound which could benefit from a more focused and incisive core of character, yet in the cadenzas she sometimes produces a surge of hard-toned loudness and speed – which, if you like disruption, is very disruptive. Additionally, on occasion she slows down excessively, then has abruptly to gear back up for the sake of the orchestra. Unlike well-worked 'rubato', which would lend convincing flexibility, Buniatishvili's hastening is more like someone texting on the stairs in the rush-hour tube, then realising that everyone is backing up behind them. With two extremes, but little in between, her interpretation is limited to two dimensions rather than the many more available.

Given serious competition, this recording is chiefly for existing Buniatishvili fans. *Jessica Duchen*

PERFORMANCE ★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Christopher Tyler Nickel

Piccolo Concerto*; Concerto for Four Wagner Tubas

*Sarah Jackson (piccolo), Holly Bryan et al (tuba); Vancouver Contemporary Orchestra/Clyde Mitchell
Avie AV2736 45:42 mins

Christopher Tyler Nickel is known for writing concertos for unusual instruments, and this album embraces two of these; one for piccolo and one for four 'Wagner' tubas. The tubas are relatively rare instruments, created by Wagner who wanted a hybrid between the French horn and the tuba. On the occasions when these are used, they are played by hornists, as the *embouchure* is the same – albeit with appropriate adjustments for the different dimensions.

Nickel has evidently tried to embrace the unique idiosyncrasies in both pieces, though the Piccolo Concerto seems rather 'safe' in the sense that he has gone for tone (excellently produced by Sarah Jackson) rather than fireworks. There are nods to Prokofiev and Shostakovich in all three movements, with the *Andante* in particular sounding strongly influenced by the darker, introspective language from this era.

Russian influences continue in the tuba concerto, though in this Nickel seems to draw much more on the landscapes of his native Canada. The ancient, earthy opening of the first movement intrigues, with hints of Janáček's *Sinfonietta*. Here, the sonorities of the tubas are warm, but also suggest the alpine horn, producing a tone of integrity, well matched with the accompanying string orchestra. The second movement draws on an even broader soundscape apparently inspired by sounds from indigenous peoples, whereas the third comes from a more contemporary place. Here, the 7/8 feel has folk country dances at its heart, and optimism – which thus far has been deeply buried – finally comes to the fore.
Anne Templer

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★

Opera & Stage

OPERA CHOICE

Hasse's operatic desert tale gets a very starry premiere

The who's who of voices in this first recording of the composer's fiery work make it a hit, says ***Berta Joncus***

Sweet clarity: Brazilian male soprano Bruno de Sá is well cast as Josue

LAURE BERNARD

Hasse

Serpentes Ignei in Deserto

Philippe Jaroussky, Jakub Józef Orliński, Bruno de Sá et al; Les Accents/Thibault Noally

Erato 2173239904 87:10 mins

Vocal stars align in this stunning world premiere. The most fashionable operatic composer of his day, Hasse was also *maestro di cappella* at Venice's female orphanage the Ospedale degli Incurabili, whose popular concerts he furnished with vehicles like this c1734 *Serpentes Ignei in Deserto* (Fiery Serpents in the Desert).

In the story, God sends the serpents among the Israelites, killing many of them, because they had grumbled 'against God and against Moses'. We hear of this in single airs of contrasting affect assigned one each to secondary dramatis personae whom director Thibault Noally shrewdly matches to the strengths of his soloists. The sweet clarity of sopranist Bruno de Sá distils the earnestness of the pious Josue, while the plangent vocalism of countertenor Carlo Vistoli is optimal for the intercessor Eleazar. Where countertenor Jakub Józef Orliński's dramatic flair communicates visceral horror at God's chastisement, countertenor David Hansen's gift for surprise in sequences and cadenzas evokes the chutzpah of Eliab. Of the two principals, Philippe Jaroussky is a majestic Moses, striding athletically through two arias, one blistering and anger-filled, the other lyric and reflective.

I might wish that *Serpentes*, written for female voices only, had been so cast. But it is in fact Julia Lezhneva, 'the Angel', who dazzles most brightly. In her second aria, she bends *prestissimo* passages to swoop and jump, executing more notes per second at more extreme intervals than seems humanly possible. Breathtaking.

> Julia Lezhneva executes more notes per second than seems humanly possible

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

PICTURE & SOUND ★★★★★

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Busoni

Doktor Faust

Olga Bezsmertna (soprano) et al; Orchestra e Coro del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino/ Cornelius Meister

Naxos 8.660531-33 156:57 mins (3CD)

This live recording of Busoni's unfinished masterpiece was recorded at the Teatro Maggio Musicale, Florence, in February 2023.

Doktor Faust is a piece that has only achieved a fraction of the success it deserves: perhaps the unique individuality of Busoni's musical language requires more sustained acquaintance with his style than, say, more popular Faust settings by other composers. But in many ways Busoni, who sets his own libretto, goes more deeply into the subject than they do. Once one gets to know it, his magnum opus reveals a unique approach to opera in a score of rare elevation and integrity.

As a dramatic work, it concentrates largely on two protagonists. Faust is sung here by baritone Dietrich Henschel, who knows the piece well, having appeared on the 1998 recording from Lyon under Kent Nagano. To this new interpretation he brings detail and intellectual rigour while the voice remains an exceptional one. He's well partnered by tenor Daniel Brenna as a leering, Mephistopheles, though at times the role's high tessitura and sheer length taxes him. Ukrainian soprano Olga Bezsmertna does well by Faust's victim the Duchess of Parma, and the smaller roles are all well taken.

Busoni did not live to complete his grand-scale project. There are two completions, of which the earliest – by his pupil Philipp Jarnach, used at the posthumous premiere in Berlin in 1925 – is heard here. Some will prefer a more recent one by conductor and musicologist Anthony Beaumont, who had access to sketches not available to Jarnach. (Nagano's recording, incidentally, includes both.) Either way, Cornelius Meister and his forces provide an honourable account of one of the 20th century's great operas. *George Hall*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★

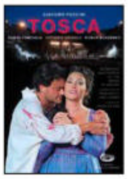
RECORDING ★★★

Puccini

Tosca

Sonya Yoncheva, Vittorio Grigolo et al; Arena di Verona Chorus & Orchestra/Francesco Ivan Ciampa; dir. Hugo de Ana (Verona, 2023)

C Major 767708 (DVD)/767804 (Blu-ray) 134 mins



An outdoor venue inevitably presents challenges when it comes to opera, both for singers and for those trying to capture a performance on film. This release circumvents all the obvious pitfalls, giving the viewer an intimate perspective on the action, with no compromise in sound quality. Thoughtfully directed camerawork pans out to full-stage for crowd scenes and we are given occasional glimpses of the spectacular backdrop of the arena, but for the most part we are up close and personal with the performers, all of whom act as if for film.

Vittorio Grigolo (Cavaradossi) has the physical bearing of a romantic hero, a honeyed voice and a fantastic command of a *legato* phrase. Perhaps he overmilks those attention-seeking tenor moments – 'Vittoria, vittoria!' – just a touch, but few will complain. His Tosca, Sonya Yoncheva, has the more powerful voice, appropriately steely in her initial jealousy but with a ravishing efflorescence as she wins over our sympathies. In all respects, she is a sensation in this role: truly one of the great Toscas of our time, and the DVD surely deserves a place in the Puccini fan's collection on that count alone. Roman Burdenko is a more understated Scarpia than many, but approaches the role with an effectively chilling restraint, and there are fine performances from Giorgi Manoshvili (Angelotti), Giulio Mastrototaro (Il Sagrestano) and Erika Zaha (Un Pastore).

The production is as old-school as they come, but there's nothing wrong with that. Dark, wrought-iron crosses, sinister panda-eyed bishops, and hooded monks evoke southern-European Roman Catholicism at its most gothic, while Tosca's pose at the end, frozen in suspended animation before her descent, is superlatively theatrical. *Alexandra Wilson*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
PICTURE & SOUND ★★★★

Sensational soprano: Sonya Yoncheva is heralded as one of the great Toscas of our time

Kate Soper

The Romance of the Rose

Lucas Steele (tenor), Anna Schubert (soprano) et al; The Wet Ink Ensemble

New Focus Recordings FCR424 127:04 mins (2CD)

There is nothing straightforward about Kate Soper's *The Romance of the Rose*, described by its brilliant US composer-librettist – and cast member – as 'loosely tethered to its unruly pan-philosophical source' in Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun's 13th-century epic poem *Le Roman de la Rose*.

Part meta-opera, part language metaphysics; part ironic rom-com, part gameshow; the work is as intriguing as it is unclassifiable – and its polystylism embodies its intent as a dreamworld allegory, ranging across musical and literary history from the medieval troubadours to today's punk-metal equivalents via neo-baroque aria, torch song and Laurie Anderson-esque experimentalism.

A woman is plucked from the audience by The Dreamer and Master of Ceremonies to become The Lover who, through a series of bewildering and intoxicating encounters with Idleness, Pleasure and The God of Love, is smitten by a (literal) rose. Pushed this way and that by the competing attentions of Lady Reason and Shame she struggles against her infatuation, veering between wish-fantasy and balloon-popping self-critique.

As the 'Allegories' start to exchange personas we discover that music, language – and opera – are compulsive yet untrustworthy means of attempting to elucidate what are paradoxical, ultimately unknowable mysteries of the human psyche.

It's a little lengthy, and momentum sags in Act II, but there is much hugely inventive to enjoy. The cast are universally excellent, with Soper herself a snarling, spitting, vocoderised Shame – while the nine, top-notch musicians are from NYC collective The Wet Ink Ensemble. *Steph Power*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Verdi

Giovanna d'Arco

Sophie Gordeladze, Héctor Sandoval et al; Czech Philharmonic Choir of Brno; Cappella Aquileia/Marcus Bosch; dir. Ulrich Proschka (Heidenheim, 2023)

Coviello COV92419 (Blu-ray) 120:14 mins

This Blu-ray presents a production of one of the least familiar of Verdi's operas filmed at the 2023 Heidenheim Festival in Baden-Württemberg in south-west Germany. Premiered at La Scala, Milan, in 1845, *Giovanna d'Arco* centres on one of the most extraordinary figures in history, Joan of Arc, as reconceived in Schiller's source-play *Die Jungfrau von Orleans*. The German dramatist comes up with an unconvincing approach to the subject in which Joan and the Dauphin (later Charles VII) are in love, and she dies not at the stake but on the battlefield.

Whatever the viability of Schiller's concept as reconfigured in Temistocle Solera's libretto, it is seriously compromised in Ulrich Proschka's production, set in a modern mental hospital where the central character is suffering from delusions. In bed at the beginning, she is drawing pictures of Carlo (or Charles) in heroic mode and is later approached by him and regularly surrounded by angels or demons attempting either to draw her closer to heaven or to hell. She never, though, leaves the hospital where groups of doctors and nurses attempt to treat her. It's a heavy-handed, cumbersome concept that undermines the piece at every turn.

Some of the singing makes up for it, notably tenor Héctor Sandoval as Charles and baritone Luca Grassi as Joan's father Giacomo, who belatedly comes to believe in his daughter's mission. Less vocally consistent is soprano Sophie Gordeladze – an uneven quantity in the title-role.

Marcus Bosch conducts the Cappella Aquileia and the Czech Philharmonic Choir of Brno with an appreciation of Verdian style, but it's not enough to counter the staging's limitations. *George Hall*

PERFORMANCE ★★
PICTURE & SOUND ★★★★

Fra l'ombre e gl'orrori

Arias etc by Cavalli, Handel, Monteverdi, Vivaldi et al

Nahuel Di Pierro (bass) et al; Ensemble Diderot/Johannes Pramsohler (violin)

Audax ADX 11210 74:02 mins

Nahuel Di Pierro is an Argentinian bass singer who is already well established on the operatic stage. His latest recording is not only an enjoyable anthology but an instructive one. The title ('Among the Shadows and the Horrors') slightly misrepresents the revelations of this album. Many think that the bass roles in early opera were boringly restricted to Gods, fathers, monsters and philosophers. But here you will also find unrequited lovers, the insane, some vengeful warriors and a bucolic retired emperor. The repertoire dates from c1640-c1740, roughly from Monteverdi to Handel.

The outstanding feature here is the voice of Di Pierro. Where others resort to squeaking or growling he maintains his full resonance and agility throughout the range, as in Handel's 'Fra l'ombre e gl'orrori' from *Aci, Galatea, e Polifemo*, which strides through two-and-a-half octaves, or the low D in the same composer's 'Cade il mondo' from *Agrippina*. His dramatic and expressive range is good too, as in the hectic, distracted *ariosa* from Cavalli's *Ercole Amante* and the mad scene from Vivaldi's *Orlando*. Seneca's death scene from Monteverdi's *Poppea* is a little stilted and over sectionalised, and here and there (in some of the *da capo* arias) we might have expected slightly more adventurous ornamentation in the repeats. Several of these tracks are premiere recordings and there are some splendid surprises. For example, Bononcini's 'Occhi belli' from his serenata on *Julius Caesar* is a truly outstanding aria full of inventive interplay between voice and orchestra, In the final item, Handel's 'Sibillar gli angui d'aletto', Di Pierro demonstrates outstanding breath control and, accompanied by trumpets and drums, his flair for the bravura style. *Anthony Pryer*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Lucrezia

Arias etc by Handel, Monteclair, Pasquini, Scarlatti et al

Sandrine Piau, Karine Deshayes (soprano) et al; Les Paladins/ Jérôme Corréas
Aparté AP359 64:00 mins

These four solo cantatas all tell the story of the Roman noblewoman Lucrezia who, after being raped, kills herself to regain her honour. Settings of the tale by Michel Montéclair – recorded here for the first time, Alessandro Scarlatti, Handel and Benedetto Marcello dress the stage for incandescent monologues by, respectively, sopranos Sandrine Piau, Amel Brahim-Djelloul and Karine Deshayes, and mezzo-soprano Lucile Richardot.

To hear one Lucrezia after another is to explore stark differences between the practice of each composer, whom director Jérôme Correas carefully pairs with a soloist. Monteclair's score supplies Piau with restlessly shifting moods, exposed lines and transparent string band accompaniment. Piau and Les Paladins seize every opportunity to heighten affect and ramp up pathos: drawn-out sighs, weighty descents, tense silences and *attaca* rhythms flow into climaxes carried by Piau's gut-punch top notes. Scarlatti's score gifts Brahim-Djelloul unfolding lyricism, jagged lines, pulse-free recitatives and absolute leadership. Her expressive *pianissimos*, raw declamation and unstoppable drive power her vocalism; accompaniment is continuo-only, which Correas deftly alters to suit the moment. Handel gave Lucrezia profound melodies, and Karine Deshayes adapts her colours to bring them out, darkening hues at low register, adding gold as she soars up to rail against her defilement and dialling back to silvery straight tones as her character expires. Marcello alternates between *arioso* and at times predictable sequential repetitions; transcending these limitations, Richardot, aided by Correas's striking realisations, uses dynamics and word sound to convey Lucrezia's agony.

Beauty alone makes bearable each soloist's visceral enactment of female suffering. *Berta Joncus*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Shadows and horrors: bass Nahuel Di Pierro showcases his great dramatic range

GETTY, JULIEN BENHAMOU

Mille Affetti

Arias etc by Cherubini, Mozart, Naumann, Righini, Tarchi et al

Bruno de Sá (countertenor); Wrocław Baroque Orchestra/Jarosław Thiel
Erato 5419799542 85 mins

Bruno de Sá is a male soprano from Brazil who normally concentrates on 18th-century operatic repertoire. His first album, called *Roma Travestita*, appeared in 2022 and focused on some fairly obscure arias first performed in that city. This one covers more cities and includes some sacred music with compositions mostly written between c1770-80. On this album five tracks are premiere recordings.

The title *Mille Affetti* (a thousand feelings) perhaps promises a greater variety of vocal expressiveness than is achieved here – the male soprano voice (not quite the same as a countertenor) is not the most pliant of instruments. What we get instead is ample evidence of outstanding technique. The vengeance aria by Cherubini, 'No, non cercar per ora', for example is full of vertiginous runs beautifully negotiated by de Sá, as are those in Mozart's 'Alleluja' from his *Exsultate jubilate* – though in the latter, one senses an anonymous brilliance rather than joy. There is affective tenderness in the aria 'Lungi da te', from *Mitridate* (written when Mozart was 14) as the character Sifare parts from his lover, the whole enhanced by some fine *obbligato* horn playing by Fabio Forgiarini. Desperate entreaties for help are projected quite well in Reichardt's *Andromeda*, and (of a religious kind) in Zingarelli's 'Salve Regina'. The former also demonstrates the singer's formidable breath control, though in the latter the opening 'Salve' exposes a tendency for a slight quiver to appear in de Sá's long notes. However his impressive high notes and the adventurousness of the collection as a whole are not in doubt. *Anthony Pryer*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Zarzuela

Tenor Arias by Serrano, Torroba, Chapi, Giménez et al

Juan Diego Flórez (tenor); Sinfonía por el Perú/ Ana María Patiño-Osorio
Flórez JDF001 47 mins

Zarzuela was born a court entertainment in the 17th century reaching its own Golden Age in the second half of the 19th century and rippling through the Spanish speaking world where it bewitched a budding tenor in Lima. That's the story Juan Diego Flórez embraces in his own label's first recording.

The songs, however, tell a slightly different cultural story, about a search for Spanish musical identity as French and German styles conquered European music theatres. The rhythms of the *Jota*, the dance that beats its way through so many of the musical numbers that were interspersed between the spoken dialogue in a *Zarzuela* is unmistakably Iberian.

Flórez chooses songs about absent or unyielding lovers – filled with yearning regret and big tunes too. And there's a sense of exile that reminds us of the Spanish diaspora across the Atlantic. Literally so in 'Adiós, Granada' from *Emigrantes* by Rafael Calleja and Tomás Barrera. He sings of Andalucía with more than a hint of the *cante jondo* throat tone that we associate with flamenco. And it's there to great effect in one of the most popular of all *Zarzuela* songs 'Por el humo se sabe dónde está el fuego', a kind of male torch song.

The local boy is admirably supported by the Peruvian Youth Choir and Orchestra. And if enthusiasm outdistances finesse, that makes their contribution more engaging. Listen to the brass and you might be sitting in a sundrenched Latin square nursing a bruised heart. *Christopher Cook*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Choral & Song

CHORAL & SONG CHOICE

JEFF BEAL
THE SALVAGE MEN
ERIC ERICSON CHAMBER CHOIR
FREDRIK MALMBERG

An outstanding selection of modern works for choir

The Eric Ericson Chamber Choir shine in this great set of pieces by US composers, says ***Kate Wakeling***

Remarkable ensemble: the Eric Ericson Chamber Choir perform with bell-like clarity

BEN EALOVEGA

Jeff Beal

The Salvage Men; plus works by Barber, Daniel Nelson and Eric Whitacre
Eric Ericson Chamber Choir/Fredrik Malmberg
BIS BIS-2599 57:45 mins

The Eric Ericson Chamber Choir are justly acclaimed as one of the world's top choirs and this outstanding new release highlights their many strengths. Featuring four warmly accessible modern works, this is an album of terrific vitality which showcases the choir's gorgeous breadth of timbre and precise sense of ensemble.

> This is an album of terrific vitality which showcases the choir's gorgeous timbre

Jeff Beal's *The Salvage Men* (2014) explores themes of pain and transformation, and was composed after Beal found himself living with a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis. Beal is best known for his film and TV scores, but this richly contemplative choral work finds him equally comfortable in the concert hall. The work opens with an affecting setting of a passage from Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis*, followed by settings of taut, beautiful poems by American poet Kay Ryan. As Ryan notes, 'It isn't ever delicate to live', and Beal's restless harmonic language offers a nuanced sense of redemption that similarly resists the sentimental.

Other highlights include a wonderfully alert account of Samuel Barber's *Reincarnations* (1939-40), which sets texts by the Irish poet James Stephens. Here the choir display a remarkable sense of ensemble, notably in the bell-like clarity of attack heard in the exuberant song of celebration, 'Mary Hynes'. The choir is on equally fine form for Daniel Nelson's *The New Colossus*, a setting of Emma Lazarus's text inscribed at the base of the Statue of Liberty which Nelson explores with commendable nuance, incorporating both blazing sonic force and a sense of tiptoeing hesitancy. Glorious accounts of two appealing Eric Whitacre works complete the selection.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

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Auric

Printemps; Chanson gothique; Vocalise; Reveil; Ecole de guerre; Aglae etc (Mélodies & Chansons)
Holger Falk (baritone), Steffen Schleiermacher (piano)
MDG 613 2334-2 66:47 mins

GEORGES AURIC

Labels can often conceal more than they reveal and the soubriquet 'Les Six' is certainly among them. Apart from rejecting Wagnerian and Impressionist aesthetics, a tendency in which they were far from alone, the composers comprising 'Les Six' pursued a range of styles rather than engaging in a strong sense of common purpose. This attractive collection of songs by Georges Auric, with Poulenc the youngest in the group, is a case in point. Prodigiously talented, Auric combined spikey modernism with an unashamedly popular style deployed to good effect in his many film scores.

Holger Falk, beautifully accompanied by Steffen Schleiermacher on a slightly brittle sounding 1901 Steinway, guides us through these songs with flawless diction and flexible tone ranging from the confidential to the carefree, as in 'Sur le Pavé de Paris' from 1952. He is also as at home in the nonsensical musings of the *Eight Songs* to poems by Jean Cocteau from 1917 as in Gérard de Nerval's frankly romantic verse where Auric blends beguiling melody with an occasional backward glance toward Fauré. The settings of poems by Max Jacob, composed at the end of the Second World War, have a more elusive quality combining reminiscence and satire which Falk delivers with gentle sensitivity. At the other end of the spectrum, the setting of René Clair's 'A nous, la liberté', with its Noël Coward-like jauntiness, is dispatched with just the right measure of false pomposity and 'Moulin des Amours', composed as part of Auric's score for John Huston's celebrated *Moulin Rouge* of 1952, has an infectious, sentimental warmth. Those looking for hidden depths will be disappointed, but there is certainly much to enjoy.
Jan Smaczny

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

JS Bach

Cantatas, BWV 4, BWV 55 and BWV 82

Yu-Wei Hu (flute), Nick Pritchard (tenor); Oxford Bach Soloists/ Tom Hammond-Davies

Signum Classics SIGCD869 57:57 mins

BACH
CANTATAS

With their debut album the Oxford Bach Soloists launch themselves into a world beyond the 'city of dreaming spires' where, since 2017, they've pursued a cantata agenda exploring Bach's vocal works chronologically. There's nothing chronological about the three cantatas presented here though. Opening with one of the best-known – albeit with a twist – there's also the only extant survivor for solo tenor, and one of Bach's earliest forays into a genre that would preoccupy his first years in Leipzig.

The project describes itself as 'a laboratory for current research' but is not entirely hidebound by scholarship. More usually experienced showcasing bass and oboe, *Ich habe genug* is given in Bach's 1731 respray, a re-imagining swapping soprano for bass, and flute for oboe – the result altogether more soft-grained, the aria 'Schlummert ein' even more lullaby-like. OBS however assigns the vocal part to Nick Pritchard's supple tenor, which suggests not so much the consummation of the aged Simeon's long-cherished desire to see the coming of Christ, but the rapturous hopefulness of subsequent generations.

Including a beautifully poised account of the central aria, 'Erbarme dich', Pritchard also takes centre-stage in BWV 55. BWV 4, by contrast, is inescapably an ensemble effort as the young Bach set out to impress, throwing everything in his compositional armoury at Luther's powerful Pascal meditation. A tour de force in seven distinctive verses, it's rewarded with a scrupulously detailed reading from director Tom Hammond-Davies who persuasively navigates the transition from despair to exultation, energising Versus 1's concluding Hallelujahs, and oxygenating Versus 3's fizzing counterpoint. Auspicious Bach auspiciously performed.
Paul Riley

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Flawless and flexible: baritone Holger Falk seems at home in Auric's songs

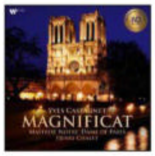
JAN-OLAV WEDIN, KAUPO KIKKAS

Yves Castagnet

Magnificat; Psalms 18 and 26

Yves Castagnet (organ); Maîtrise Notre-Dame de Paris/Henri Chalet

Warner Classics 2173225085 57:17 mins



This recording of Yves Castagnet's lustrous setting of the Magnificat was released as the 'official album' celebrating the re-opening of Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris in December, renewed and restored after the catastrophic fire of 2019. The live premiere of the new work will have to wait until the autumn, since Notre-Dame's ruined choir organ is still under repair.

As choir organist since 1988, Castagnet provides training for the cathedral choir school, *La Maîtrise Notre-Dame de Paris*, with its five choral ensembles of children, teenagers and adults. This is a highly expressive, vividly recorded performance capturing the excitable drama of Castagnet's organ playing, with the singers brought to the fore.

Bach's Magnificat, says Castagnet, inspired the form and mood of this setting. You can hear the influence, for example, in the rapturous joy of the opening chorus, the liltingly sad heartbeat of the 'Et misericordia' and the dynamic drive of 'Sicut locutus est'. Castagnet's work, though, is no pastiche of Bach. His Magnificat is characterised by lush, post-Romantic harmonies, with the warm-toned altos and tenors of *La Maîtrise* providing a glowing, beautifully blended core to the sound.

The choir's director, Henri Chalet, draws gorgeous singing from his forces, capitalising on the sonorous acoustic of the Basilica of Sainte-Clotilde, *La Maîtrise*'s temporary home during the restoration. The 'Gloria Patri' finale, with its ecstatic Amen, seems like a musical depiction of the recent fortunes of Notre-Dame, taking us from resignation to bounding elation.

Three of Castagnet's psalm settings, written for liturgical use, conclude the recording, with generous helpings of rich, thickly spread harmonies, soon to resonate again in the light-filled, soaring spaces of Notre-Dame.
Ashutosh Khandekar

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Tom Coult

After Lassus*; Beautiful Caged Thing*; Pleasure Garden**; Three Pieces that Disappear

*Anna Dennis (soprano), **Daniel Pioro (violin); BBC Philharmonic/ Martyn Brabbins et al

NMC NMC D261 73:21 mins

PIECES THAT DISAPPEAR

There is something ominous about the debut album from Tom Coult. Across four works, he takes us to darkly dramatic places with his expressive writing and playful textures.

The title track, *Three Pieces that Disappear*, wistfully explores concepts of memory and imagination, particularly prescient for the composer during the Covid pandemic, when there was a sense, he says, 'of music (including my own), disappearing, fading away.' The effects here are an almost eerie sense of the instruments of the orchestra meandering around one another, with the music working itself out listlessly as the piece progresses. With the multiplicity of layers woven together, the listening experience could be soupy – but NMC has ensured it's far from that, nurturing a full bodied, well balanced sound.

After her standout performance in the eponymous role in Coult's debut opera *Violet* in 2022, Anna Dennis rejoins the composer in *Beautiful Caged Thing*, a work for soprano solo and orchestra. Inspired by lines from Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the trio of movements sees Dennis's birdlike soprano shimmer over the surface of the orchestra, who support with a playful, yet disarming tapestry of responses. The rhythmic vocals are in constant interplay with the orchestra: this is Coult's writing at its most expansive and dramatic.

There is a real variety of music here, as we now move to a violin concerto, titled *Pleasure Garden*, with movement titles as prosaic as the last. Daniel Pioro's violin line holds court, while plinkety strings and sustained wind lines dance around it, in almost chaotic fashion.

The final work, *After Lassus*, is based on duets from Orlando Lassus's *Novae aliquot*, reworked for orchestra and soprano. Low-level discomfort abounds once more, with Anna Dennis providing another glistening, haunting performance. *Freya Parr*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★

Hugo

Mélodies sur des poèmes de Victor Hugo (Orch. Dubugnon)

Karine Deshayes; Sandrine Piau et al; Chœur de l'Opéra de Dijon; Orchestre Victor Hugo/Jean-François Verdier

Alpha Classics ALPHA1086 57:52 mins

The fifth and youngest child of the great writer Victor Hugo, Adèle was the only one of her siblings to survive their father, but she spent the second half of her life in mental institutions, dying in 1915 at the age of 85. The story of her obsession with a British army officer, her global wanderings in pursuit of him and her slide into illness is told in François Truffaut's 1975 film *L'Histoire d'Adèle H*. What was less-well known, until now, was Adèle Hugo's gift for music.

During her early years in Paris, and then during the Hugo family's exile on Jersey and Guernsey following Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état* in 1851, Adèle studied piano, attended concerts, corresponded with musicians and wrote several short pieces. Her manuscripts – many of which are incomplete and fragmentary – have been collected, pieced together and orchestrated by the composer Richard Dubugnon. The result is a fascinating collection of 14 songs set to poems by Adèle's father, plus five 'songs without words' arranged for solo instruments and piano. The pieces show Adèle's flair for melodic invention and bear the influence of the Hugos' musical acquaintances. Traces of Liszt, Berlioz and Bertin are clearly audible. The most affecting work is her setting of 'Oh! pourquoi te cacher?' from Hugo's *Autumn Leaves*. A lament about lost love, melancholy and death, it is her most autobiographical song.

Top-rate singers, led by Anaïs Constans and Axelle Fanyo give deeply expressive performances, perfectly enunciating every syllable. They are, appropriately enough, given warm and empathetic orchestral support by the Victor Hugo Orchestra, based in the writer's home city of Besançon. *John-Pierre Joyce*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★

RECORDING ★★★★

Matthew Martin

Masses, Canticles, Motets

The Choir of Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge/Matthew Martin

Linn Records CKD743 78:51 mins

Matthew Martin
Masses, Canticles, Motets

Matthew Martin is a familiar name in today's lively choral scene in Britain, fashioning new pieces to order for choirs around the country, from schools and festivals to the nation's most august choral establishments. He is disarmingly self-effacing about his work in his booklet note introducing a collection of short works written between 2004 and 2022. His compositional style, he says, 'sits broadly (and rather unfashionably these days) somewhere between Britten and Leighton – with bits of Berkeley and Walton thrown in for good measure.' I would scroll back further to Vaughan Williams and Holst as obvious reference points.

Many of the commissions on this album arise from long-standing associations with Oxbridge choirs along with Westminster Cathedral and Brompton Oratory. Martin's Catholic leanings are evident in a French influence, with echoes of Duruflé, and in the Marian texts and plainsong that recur through his works.

There are no grand gestures or stylistic quirks. Martin is a pragmatist who aims, he states, to compose 'useful' music for young choirs of varying abilities, steeped in a tradition that excited him as a chorister, which he fears is being eroded. Not that his music is bland: the complex layering of counterpoint in the *Missa Speravimus*, the painterly drama of 'I Saw The Lord', evocative settings of carols and the magnificent *Service for St John's Cambridge*, are full of polyphony and harmonic brio.

The choir of Gonville & Caius, Cambridge, where Martin is director, provides a reassuringly traditional, transparent and disciplined choral blend, underpinned by exemplary organ playing – a perfect vehicle for this enjoyable and varied retrospective of a master craftsman's work. *Ashutosh Khandekar*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

RECORDING ★★★★★

Schubert

Lieder

Philippe Jaroussky (countertenor), Jérôme Ducros (piano)

Erato 9029673768 64:36 mins

SCHUBERT LIEDER
PHILIPPE JAROUSSKY
JÉRÔME DUCROS

Two stanzas into the first song – 'Litanei auf das Fest aller Seelen' – and you all but forget any misgivings you might have harboured about a countertenor tackling Schubert's lieder. In their third recorded recital Philippe Jaroussky and Jérôme Ducros inhabit this music with assurance.

A carefully chosen programme, travelling from day to night, from love's disappointments to the imminence of death combines pearls from the Schubert repertoire with lesser-known treasures. How good to hear Jaroussky sing the rarely performed 'Wiedersehn' – almost a ballad and with the briefest of postludes suffused with regret.

Jaroussky's diction is immaculate; every word is crystal clear, every line understood and lived. In Mignon's 'Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt' and 'Du bist die Ruh' the legato is seamless; and when Jaroussky allows himself a vocal decoration it is to underscore the meaning never simply for effect. He is an instinctive storyteller who transports you inside the narrative of each song: in 'Des Fischers Liebesglück' we are out on the lake at night with the young lovers. In 'Die Forelle' we are on the bank with the dastardly angler.

Throughout, Jérôme Ducros is a faithful Schubert partner who never loses his own identity, whether racing alongside the son of the muses in 'Der Musensohn' or reeling with despair as Mignon remembers her homeland. The best comes almost last with Jaroussky floating an ethereal line on the moonlight at the start of 'Nacht und Träume' and then rising to a heart stopping crescendo as men listen to their dreams with joy, while Ducros makes the moonlight and that joy palpable. *Christopher Cook*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

RECORDING ★★★★

Vivaldi

Stabat Mater; Nisi Dominus; Concerti

Carlo Vistoli (countertenor); Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin

Harmonia Mundi HMM902383

67:53 mins

VIVALDI
Sacro furore

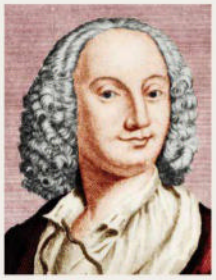
Antonio Vivaldi, the so-called 'red priest', stopped saying mass three years after he was ordained in 1703. His excuse was that asthma prevented him from making it all the way through the liturgy. But the real reason was his determination to pursue a musical career. Nevertheless, the religious sentiments Vivaldi failed to deliver at the altar found their way into a string of exquisite motets.

The three works featured on this album also point to Vivaldi's burning ambition to be an opera composer. *Nisi Dominus* sounds like a try-out work for the Teatro Sant'Angelo in Venice, where he made his first operatic ventures. The sinewy viola d'amore in the 'Gloria Patri et Filio' section is also a reminder that he composed the work for his students at the Ospedale della Pietà. The first and third movements of *In furore iustissimæ iræ*, with their frenetic pace and remorseful reflection could have come from one of his later stage works. The *Stabat Mater* fuses dramatic intensity with deep spiritual feeling.

Countertenor Carlo Vistoli gives an arresting performance, marked by an intense reading of the texts and clear, persuasive diction. He fluidly moves from lament, to fury, to contemplation with a voice that is both technically brilliant and emotionally seductive. He is equalled in sensitive musicianship by the Berlin Academy players under Georg Kallweit's insightful direction. *John-Pierre Joyce*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

RECORDING ★★★★★



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BACKGROUND TO...
Vivaldi's *Nisi Dominus*

Of all of Vivaldi's devotional works the Nisi Dominus stands out, with the nine-movement solo cantata showcasing rather more musical imagination and ambition than you might expect from a 'mere' psalm setting. No autograph score exists, but it's largely believed Vivaldi worked on his setting of the Vesper Psalm 127 around 1713-17 while in post at the Ospedale della Pietà. As such, we may rightly assume it was premiered there. Originally set for solo alto, strings and keyboard, Vivaldi returned to it in 1739, reimagining it for three voices and orchestra.

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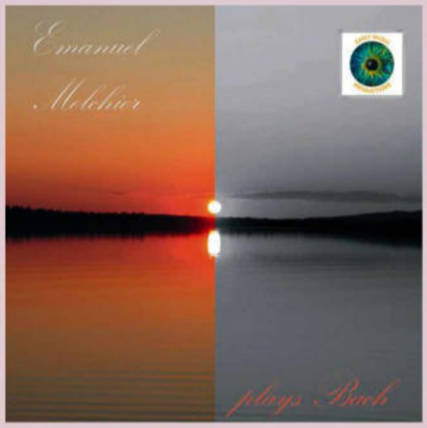
Emanuel Melchior grew up in an environment characterised by music. As the only son of a flutist and a harpsichordist, he attended his parents' public concerts from an early age, and music shaped his entire childhood.

Today Emanuel Melchior is happy about the basic education he received in his childhood. Even as a teenager, the now 36-year-old pianist was mainly interested in music from the Renaissance and Baroque periods, which still fascinates him today. William Byrd, John Dunstable, Orlando di Lasso, Claudio Monteverdi, Orlando Gibbons, Georg Philipp Telemann and Georg Friedrich Handel, among others, form a solid foundation here. The music of Johann Sebastian Bach was omnipresent. Bach's compositions surrounded Emanuel from a young age and left a lasting impression.

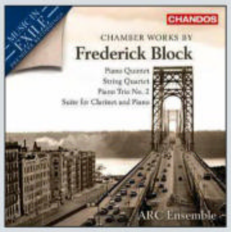
Over the years, Emanuel developed a special focus on the Goldberg Variations, a masterpiece by Bach known for its complexity and depth of color. These variations offered him the opportunity to express both technical skill and emotional depth. The recording studio became a refuge for Emanuel. Here he could develop his musicality and fully bring out the complexity of his interpretation. The intimate atmosphere of a studio, surrounded by technology and like-minded people, enabled him to concentrate on what was essential: the music itself.

Recording the Goldberg Variations was a project close to his heart. When he made the decision to record this monumental work, he was aware of the responsibility that came with it. His aim was to capture the depth and beauty of Bach's music and to let it shine in a new light. Emanuel observed how the individual pieces of music came together to form a harmonious whole. Through the two fugues, he took the opportunity to introduce listeners to the complex world of contrapuntal mastery and to familiarise them with the challenges and joys of musical dialogue. This album is intended as a reminder of the truthfulness and spirituality of early music and is also a testimony to Emanuel's own attitude.



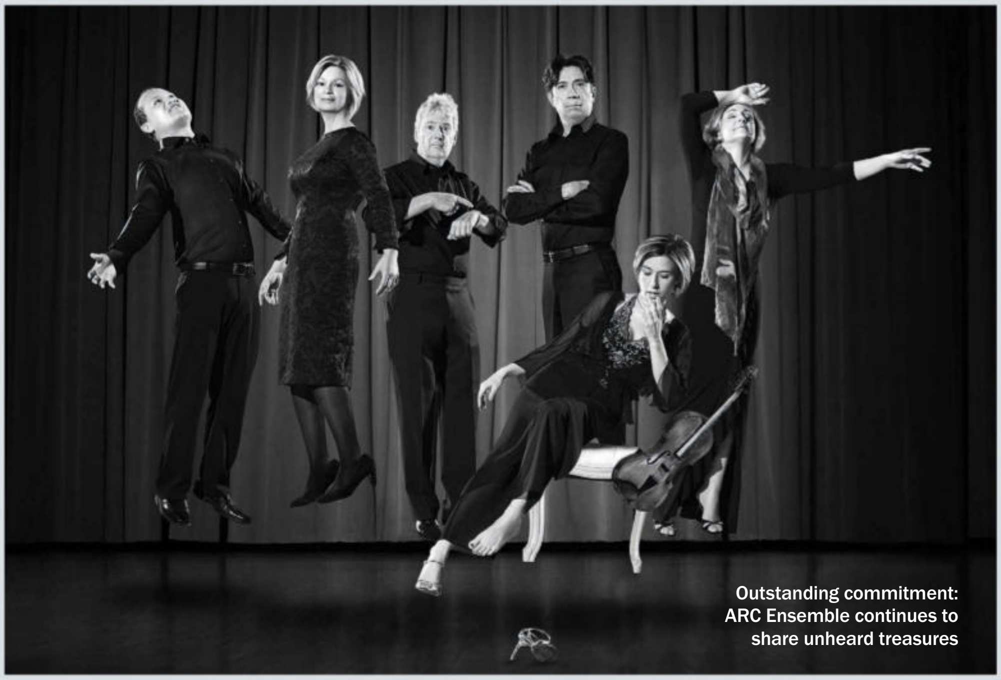
Chamber

CHAMBER CHOICE



Cherishable works by an exiled Austrian composer

Erik Levi **enjoys discovering the life and music of Frederick Block in this superb ARC Ensemble album**



Outstanding commitment: ARC Ensemble continues to share unheard treasures

Block

Piano Trio No. 2; String Quartet etc
ARC Ensemble
Chandos CHAN 20358 70:54 mins

Born in 1899 into a prosperous Viennese Jewish family, Frederick Block was one of many hugely talented Austrian musicians whose careers suffered as a result of the *Anschluss*. A composition pupil of Hans Gál, he forged a growing reputation in his native country until being forced to emigrate to the United States in the late 1930s. Managing to scrape a meagre living in New York by making piano transcriptions of works by other composers, Block nonetheless continued to write prolific amounts of concert music before his premature death in 1945.

> There's little doubt Block was a fluent composer with a strong personal identity

In his excellent booklet notes, Simon Wynberg classifies Block as an unashamedly conservative composer whose outlook was out of step with the modernist aesthetic of the Second Viennese School. Yet I feel that this categorisation doesn't tell the full story. True, there are some moments of Viennese nostalgia with gorgeously lush harmonies in the piano chamber works that are reminiscent of Korngold. But Block's work is never one-dimensional, since passionately Romantic expression often gives way to leaner textures, a more angular melodic line and a sardonic wit that place him closer to the soundworld of Poulenc. Good examples are the unexpectedly jazzy syncopations of the Second Piano Trio's second movement and the concisely argued Suite for Clarinet and Piano.

Although it may be helpful to place Block's music in some kind of historical perspective, there is little doubt that he was an extremely fluent composer with a strong personal identity whose cause is brilliantly served here by outstandingly committed playing from the ARC Ensemble and a superbly vivid recording.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

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JS Bach

The Art of Fugue (arr. string quartet)
Quartetto di Cremona
Orchid Classics ORC100342 77:21 mins

JS BACH
THE ART OF FUGUE
QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

Hot on the heels of the Cuarteto Casals's 2023 album for Harmonia Mundi comes another interpretation of *The Art of Fugue* for string quartet. Quartetto di Cremona's new release for Orchid Classics celebrates the ensemble's 25th anniversary in 2025.

Conceived in two stages: c1738-42 and c1745-50 *The Art of Fugue* was not published in Bach's lifetime, appearing in 1751 under the auspices of his son Carl Philipp Emanuel. This contrapuntal legacy of JS Bach is preserved in surviving manuscripts but none specifies the exact instrumentation. Whether or not the work was intended for keyboard, *The Art of Fugue* inspires interpretations from timbrally homogenous performing media.

In contrast to other recordings, Quartetto di Cremona utilises different groupings from within the quartet. In fact, only three of the album's 21 tracks employ the typical string quartet lineup. The remaining tracks feature duo, trio and quartet groupings, making use of two violas, tenor viola and even a recorder. Contrapunctus 2 and 9 (violin, viola, tenor viola and cello) reveal inner voices anew through a synthesis of tessitura. The three movements are scored for two violins, tenor viola and cello (Contrapunctus 3, 4 and 10). The *Canon alla Ottava* celebrates an articulatory affinity between the violin and the descant recorder – the latter performed by violist Simone Gramaglia, a pleasing nod to the musical versatility of Bach's own time!

As a testament to the enduring appeal of JS Bach's music this new interpretation of *The Art of Fugue* is indeed a new musical offering!
Ingrid Pearson

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Boccherini

Cello Concertos; Sonatas; Quintets (Music of the Angels)
Steven Isserlis (cello) et al; Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment
Hyperion CDA68444 75:43 mins

This Boccherini selection box includes some of his lesser-known chamber and orchestral works.

The OAE and soloist-director Steven Isserlis open with the D major Cello Concerto G479, a sunny work that suits Isserlis's effervescent persona. Boccherini (himself a virtuoso cellist) showcases his instrument's ability to soar into the stratosphere, as if to say: violists, eat your heart out! Nothing daunted, Isserlis produces a sweet cantabile sound even at the dizzying high end of the fingerboard. The concerto – like the A major one also recorded here – features passages of chamber-like intimacy which the players clearly relish: notably, in the D major work's opening *Allegro* when the high-voiced cello is accompanied only by two violins – to ethereal effect – and in its *Adagio*, whose yearning motifs are woven into a filmy fabric. Isserlis adds discreet ornamentation and his own cadenzas, despatched with his characteristic *brio*.

Boccherini's palette darkens in the C minor Cello Sonata whose opening movement features eerily slithering chromatic lines which grow ever-more impassioned. In the pathos-laden *Largo*, Isserlis makes his cello sing, speak and sigh by turns, while in the lolloping triple-time last movement, the instrument imitates here a hunting horn, there a musette. Harpsichordist Maggie Cole provides exquisite continuo realisations, though the harpsichord is a little recessed in the balance. In the F major Sonata, a continuo cello (played by Luise Buchberger) replaces the harpsichord, creating an eloquent two-cello dialogue.

Finally, in the String Quintet in D minor G280 – the album's centrepiece – Isserlis and friends entwine Boccherini's lyrical strands into a felicitous musical conversation: balanced, measured and fully in keeping with his gallant idiom. *Kate Bolton-Porciatti*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Brahms • Schumann

Brahms: 2 Sonatas for Clarinet (or Viola) Op. 120; 5 Lieder, Op. 49; **Schumann:** Märchenbilder
James Ehnes (violin/viola), Andrew Armstrong (piano)
Onyx ONYX4256 61:31 mins

Unlike a book, you can sometimes judge a recording by its cover. In this case, an unassuming montage of black and white photos reflects the modest personae of lauded Canadian violinist/violist James Ehnes and his regular duo partner, pianist Andrew Armstrong. The images offer a window onto the private world of the recording studio, revealing not only the technical set up but the very personal interludes of laughter interspersing intense listening and communication. They show, too, the beautiful grain of an exceptional instrument, the 1696 'Archinto' Stradivari viola; on loan from the Royal Academy of Music, it lends a particularly sonorous voice to this recording.

The viola is not spoilt for choice in terms of 19th-century repertoire but here we have its cornerstones: Schumann's fantastical miniatures, *Märchenbilder* (fairy-tale pictures), and the two great and contrasting Brahms Op. 120 Sonatas. Brahms was famously inspired to compose them having been captivated by the artistry of clarinettist Richard Mühlfeld, and he published them soon after in a version for viola, subtly recasting the clarinet part where needed.

Given the different methods of tone production required to switch from violin to viola Ehnes, whose first instrument is violin, produces an impressive, seemingly effortless quality of sound throughout. He and Armstrong move convincingly from the turbulent opening of the F minor Sonata, through shifting, harmonically opaque movements to the virtuosic closing of the E flat Sonata. Ehnes's ample use of vibrato, rather than being cloying, contributes to a full-bodied and coloured interpretation of these pieces. An encore of sorts, the pair play an arrangement of Brahms's tender cradle song, *Wiegenlied*, further emphasising the very human-like voice of this most soulful of instruments.
Suzanne Rolt

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Geminiani

Cello Sonatas
Octavie Dostaler-Lalonde (cello)
Challenge Classics CC 72991 53:49 mins

Brilliant Bach: Quartetto di Cremona give a new shine to *The Art of Fugue*

Back in the day, Francesco Geminiani was a major player in the Baroque world, performing in London with the likes of Handel. He arrived in the English capital with impeccable credentials, having trained under Corelli and Scarlatti. So why does he remain a relatively obscure figure today? Perhaps because his style is rather quirky, characterised by irregular melodic phrases and unpredictable progressions. This reflects his intention to depart from the tried and tested formulae of Corelli and offer something more complex. The result is a rich harmonic legacy, which Octavie Dostaler-Lalonde and Postscript serve to perfection.

The outstanding quality of these performances owes much to the long-time partnership Dostaler-Lalonde has forged with harpsichordist Artem Belogurov and continuo cellist Victor Garcia. This creates an intuitive reaction which lends a delicious spontaneity to their interpretations. But intuition joins forces with a thorough study of historical performance practice placing special focus on the cello continuo's realisation of the bass line. In comparison with other ensembles, Postscript allow for more creativity in this particular role, with imaginative arrangements for piccolo cello lending a rich texture to the overall sonority.

Given Geminiani's propensity for almost continuous asymmetrical writing, the biggest challenge faced by the performers is to allow the phrases to breathe. In this regard, the interpretations are extremely alert, sounding beautifully characterised and natural, using an imaginative variety of different timbres to realise the continuo line. A mesmerisingly beautiful transcription of a Sonata for two Violins, here delivered on two piccolo cellos, is an absolute winner. Equally, the Sonata Op. 5 No. 2 is etched with energy and colour, while the arrangements from Geminiani's *Art of Playing the Guitar* are fascinating. *Jo Talbot*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

NIKOLAJ LUND, NATION WONG

Mozart

Serenade in C, K648 'A Very Little Night Music'

Leonhard Baumgartner, Margarita Pochebut (violin), Svenja Dose (double bass), Oscar Jockel (harpsichord) et al

DG 486 6979 etc (3x digital singles)

Recent months have yielded both a new Waltz by Chopin and, of arguably greater historical significance, this previously unknown Serenade, now formally authenticated and listed as No. 648 in the updated Köchel catalogue of Mozart's complete works.

Such priceless finds are cause for celebration: this seven-movement Serenade is not simply trifling juvenilia, but rather an accomplished essay in one of the most fashionable musical genres of the late 1760s. Unsurprisingly dubbed 'A Very Little Night-Music', it survived in a copy made around 1780, long-since forgotten, but lately exhumed from the Carl Becker Collection of the Municipal Library of Leipzig, and validated by Dr Ulrich Leisinger and his team from the Salzburg Mozarteum, where it was heard for the first time in 2024.

DG have taken the unusual step of releasing three separate recordings of this work, heard in differing performing versions. While this might be seen as an ideal opportunity to showcase some of the Yellow label's emerging talent (most of the players are around Mozart's age at the time he is thought to have written this Serenade), both chamber versions sound surprisingly alike, only deviating substantially over questions of tempo. There is, frankly, very little to choose between the two, with Baumgartner, Pochebut, Dose and Jockel perhaps having the edge over their rivals (Shinoyama, Klinar, Comploi and Birsak) in their vivacious account.

Meanwhile, the reduced string section of the Gewandhausorchester under Herbert Blomstedt play with alluring tonal refinement and impeccable ensemble, too, and it is their more immediately accessible version which probably stands to gain most converts to this delectable 'new' Mozart work. *Michael Jameson*

PERFORMANCES ★★★★★
RECORDINGS ★★★★★

Fabulous in Phibbs: Piatti Quartet have a close relationship with the British composer

VENETIA JOLLANDS

Joseph Phibbs

String Quartets Nos 2-4

Piatti Quartet

Nimbus NI 6452 55:57 mins

Joseph Phibbs was 40 when he composed his first numbered string quartet, in 2014. Some ten years on, he has recently produced his fourth – for the commissioners of that roundly welcomed work, the Piatti Quartet, who here render all three subsequent quartets with wonderfully subtle perceptiveness.

Already creatively surefooted – and steeped in strings since a young cellist – Phibbs has only grown in stature over the past decade. And the same is true of the prize-winning Piatti, for whom Phibbs has become their most-performed contemporary composer. The rich, mutual understanding they share readily communicates to the listener.

Each work has its own transparency of form and texture which shows an unabashed debt to Britten among other forebears. Yet it's completely Phibbs's voice that emerges through his wholly coherent and idiosyncratic – often understated, deceptively simple – use of quasi-tonal and rhythmic devices, with supple flickers of blues, Balkan folk and more.

It's only on arrival at the upwards-yearning final movement of String Quartet No. 2 (2015) that the ingenuity of its structural and expressive arc becomes clear, as the preceding sections – complete in themselves – lead to a radiantly reflective close.

String Quartet No. 3 (2018, revised 2021) is dedicated to former teacher Steven Stucky (1949-2016) and its restrained yet propulsive first movement is the most substantial. But the ensuing four prove equally variegated, and more affecting still, even where quirkiest in the harmonically uncanny fourth, 'Corrente'.

The use of cello as melodic as well as harmonic underpinning is nowhere more striking than in Quartet No. 4 (2024). Described as 'a sequence of short character pieces', oscillating motifs and folk rhythms combine with an English whimsy unafraid of its passionate emotional core. *Steph Power*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Rihm

Fremde Szenen

Irvine Arditti (violin), Gianluca Pirisi (cello), Roberta Pandolfi (piano)

Odradek ODRCD456 54:20 mins

FREMDE SZENEN

When Wolfgang Rihm died last July, he left over 500 works, and, although they often display an acerbic edge, he was keen for them to relate to the past, saying: 'Music must be full of emotion, but emotion must be full of complexity'. *Fremde Szenen* (Strange Scenes) are subtitled 'attempts at a piano trio', and reflect the composer's love of the music of Robert Schumann. That doesn't mean that they bathe in a Romantic aura: the first of the Scenes may occasionally land on a consonance, but it's mostly propelled through a barely tonal path with fractured rhythms and fierce attacks.

The second Scene is often more sustained in the strings, and Romantic gestures are easier to find, although they're never used in a conventionally functional manner. Rhythms sometimes have a sense of regularity, with motoric figures and pounding, repeated piano chords underlying the melodic string writing, but there's little feeling of repose: this keeps you on the edge of your seat for over 20 minutes.

Quiet, discrete gestures usher in the third Scene, with the odd violent irruption, but the Romantic feel is much more sustained here, despite distortions, and it rises to an almost conventional climax, before a rapid final disintegration. It's hard to imagine a more involved set of performances, and the same goes for *Antlitz*, for violin and piano, where Arditti produces an amazing range of tone, mostly at a restrained dynamic, and the progress of the music has the same inevitability as late Morton Feldman. *Martin Cotton*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

American Sketches

Works by Beach*, Burleigh, Gershwin, JJ Johnson, Joplin, Monk, John Novacek, Kevin Puts and Jonathan Ragonese

Kristin Lee (violin), Jeremy Ajani Jordan, *Jun Cho (piano)

FHR FHR147 53:05 mins

American Sketches
Kristin Lee

Not for the first time, the cover of a self-consciously American album features its principal artist performing on the Brooklyn Bridge, with skyscrapers in the distance. Within the artist's accompanying booklet note, also not for the first time, current buzzwords keep returning: 'journey', 'changes', 'differences'. Any sense of *déja vu*, however, is blasted away by the South Korean-born violinist Kristin Lee and pianist Jeremy Ajani Jordan's dizzying opening track: the first of John Novacek's *Four Rags* from 1999. Rightly called *Intoxication*, it's a deliriously madcap treatment of Joplin's stylistic tricks; the three other rags aren't bad, either.

Other highlights of this Americana collage include Jonathan Ragonese's *non-poem 4* (awful title, good jazz-classical fusion) and the simplicities of HT Burleigh's *Southland Sketches*, unassuming ruminations on African-American spirituals. The late-19th-century embroidery of Amy Beach's *Romance* (the sole work recorded with Jun Cho as pianist) isn't as fulfilling, though it engages the ear more than Kevin Puts's watery *Air*.

Whether you delight in the remaining items – three semi-improvised jazz renderings of Gershwin, Joplin, and JJ Johnson and a glide through Thelonious Monk – crucially depends on your musical taste, though the futility of a quiet violin trying to follow the footsteps of Johnson's trombone in his 1954 hit *Lament* should be universally obvious. Lee's attempt to echo John Coltrane's dark smoky saxophone in Monk's *Mood* is less doomed, but does little to shift the feeling that an album of good intentions and artistry has ultimately been weakened by some rather questionable repertoire choices. *Geoff Brown*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★

The Frans Brüggen Project

Works by JS Bach, Brüggen, Haydn, Corelli, Marcello et al

Lucie Horsch (recorder); Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century

Decca 487 0642 66:10 mins

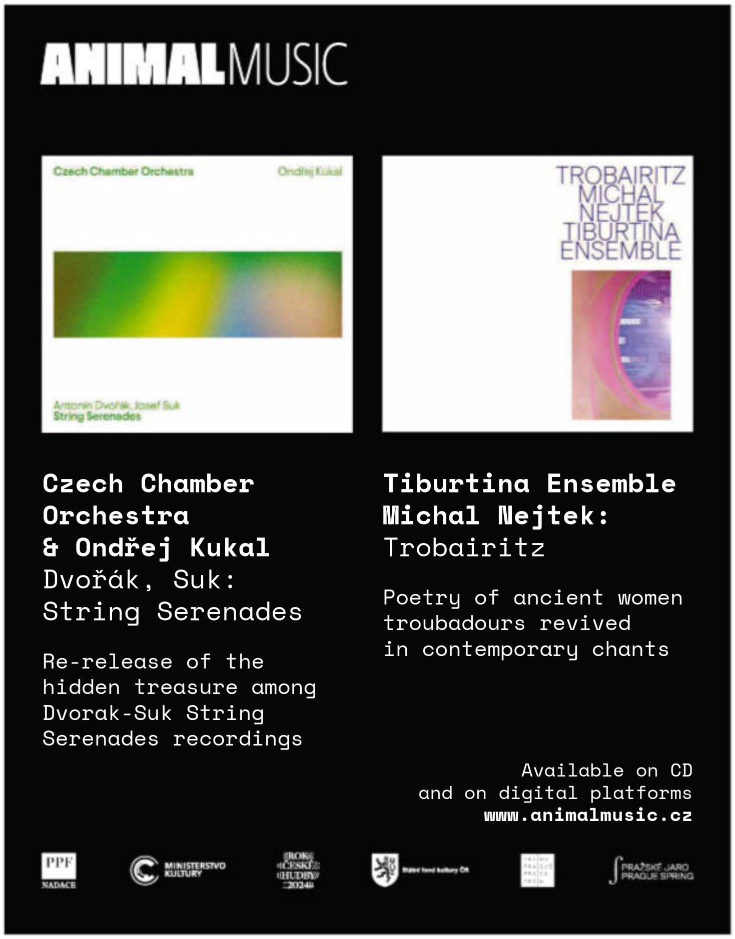
Lucie Horsch
The Frans Brüggen Project

In her latest release, Dutch virtuoso Lucie Horsch has hit upon a fascinating idea of playing 15 recorders of different sizes from the collection of the late Frans Brüggen. The album fulfils a double function inasmuch as Horsch intends it to be a gesture of homage to Brüggen himself and to the Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century which he founded with his cellist nephew, Albert Brüggen in 1981, and which features intermittently here.

As in two of her previous recordings, Horsch interweaves pieces written specifically for members of the recorder family with arrangements of her own, as well as others which she made in collaboration with Frans Brüggen, and by Iain Farrington. All the genuine recorder pieces will be familiar to assiduous practitioners of the instrument for whom this album will be of particular interest. Indeed, it is the instruments themselves which provide the focal point since the programme in many instances features selected movements from sonatas and suites rather than complete works. It seems to me a pity, though, to play only two of the four movements belonging to Telemann's A minor Trio for recorder, violin and basso continuo from one of his finest instrumental anthologies, *Essercizii Musici*. Likewise, Horsch gives us only two of the four movements of Handel's F major recorder Sonata. Where arrangements are concerned this is perhaps more understandable, but Handel and Telemann provide the album's high-water mark of original music for treble recorder, and listeners who know the music must be disappointed.

For the most part, though, this is a rewarding enterprise, sympathetically recorded and with an essential chart indicating where on the album each instrument can be heard. *Nicholas Anderson*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★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Instrumental

INSTRUMENTAL CHOICE

Domenico Scarlatti
Francesco Corti

Francesco Corti thrills in this resplendent Scarlatti

Nicholas Anderson **enjoys the bravura of the Italian harpsichordist's survey of these evocative solo works**

Kinetic flair: Corti taps into Scarlatti's dance-like gestures

D Scarlatti

Harpsichord Sonatas (A Man of Genius)
Francesco Corti (harpsichord)
Arcana A568 86:22 mins

What a resplendent panoply of Iberian colour emerges from Scarlatti's breathtakingly original and unfailingly varied harpsichord sonatas. They comprise a microcosm of so much character that we traditionally associate with Spanish music; and none of it is lost in this fine recording by the Italian virtuoso, Francesco Corti. While less than a handful of the 16 sonatas that he has chosen enjoy frequent currency, the remainder may be unfamiliar to all but the real connoisseurs.

Setting the seal on this release is the bell-like clarity of Corti's instrument

It has been perceptively observed that in his sonatas Scarlatti aimed at sounds distinct from their period, enriching them with an astonishingly wide expressive palette. Corti responds to their originality with playing that is unhurried, conversationally punctuated and which draws us in to the kinetic gesture of dance. So much is evidenced in the B flat Sonata, K249, while the percussive quality in the Sonatas K243 and K248 is realised with evocative aplomb. Hand-crossing is required for Sonatas K217 and K243, giving them an additional bravura aspect, but this is a comparatively infrequent occurrence in Scarlatti's multi-faceted art, providing contrast with the introspective and intimate language of the Sonatas K208 and K213. The A minor Sonata, K217, on the other hand, is striking for its twitchy rhythm.

Setting the seal on an outstanding release is the bell-like clarity of Corti's instrument by Philippe Humeau, after Italian models. The sound has been faithfully captured by the recording engineer and the imaginative cover features tarot-shaped playing cards of Scarlatti and his amiable employer and erstwhile pupil Maria Barbara, Princess of the Asturias.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

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JS Bach

Organ Works, Vol. 6
Masaaki Suzuki (organ)
BIS BIS-2731 60:14 mins

It's curious that Vol. 6 of Masaaki Suzuki's ongoing journey through the organ music of JS Bach isn't a double-album set embracing the complete preludes of the *Leipziger Choräle*, 'The Great 18'. Instead, he breaks off after the three contrasting treatments of *Nun komm' der Heiden Heiland* and leaves us hanging mid-collection. Perhaps it shouldn't come as a surprise. Eminently suited to a single album, the *Orgelbüchlein* was only partially surveyed in Vol. 4, and Suzuki evidently likes to pick and mix. Here he returns to the mighty Arp Schnitger instrument in Groningen's Martinikerk on which he began the project a decade ago, and the propulsive drive of the opening fantasia on *Komm, heiliger Geist* carries all before it with the unstoppable clarity of purpose that is the hallmark of Suzuki's playing.

The tri-partite architecture of *O Lamm Gottes unschuldig* is unfolded with compelling lucidity; the airborne lightness of the trio on *Herr Jesu Christ dich zu uns wend* twinkles; whilst such is Suzuki's expressively unfussy approach the most intimate chorale preludes such as *Schmücke dich* emerge almost unmediated – as if Bach, alone in the organ loft, is communing with his deepest spiritual convictions. Occasionally Suzuki's phrasing could rise to a little more spacious flexibility, and *Von Gott will ich nicht lassen* will prove a little brisk for some; but capped by the refulgent 'pleno' of BWV 661, Vol. 6 ends on a magisterial high. Roll on the remaining 'Leipzigers'. *Paul Riley*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Chopin

Waltz in A minor 'Found in New York'
Lang Lang
DG 487 7575 (digital single) 81 secs

LANG LANG
CHOPIN WALTZ IN A MINOR

Lost treasure or clever fake? Last autumn's announcement that a 'new' piece by Chopin had been discovered at the Morgan

Library and Museum in New York set the musical world abuzz. Analysis of handwriting, ink and paper mean that it's been dated to 1830-35 and is thought in all likelihood to be authentic, but we may have to wait some time for a definite conclusion. In its haste to hail the discovery, the *New York Times* posted a video of Lang Lang playing the piece, and DG join in the scramble with this release under the bold title of Waltz in A minor— overlooking other Chopin waltzes in that key, not least the profoundly touching Op. 34 No. 2.

Almost brutal in the work's not very characteristic opening, Lang Lang's bumpy playing hardly makes the case for a piece that at 48 bars' duration could be a fragment of something bigger. But Warsaw's Chopin Institute, suggesting that the work be provisionally called Waltz in A minor 'Found in New York', has released on its YouTube channel Tomasz Ritter's performance on an original Chopin Pleyel, a beautiful interpretation that makes one more inclined to believe in this new Chopinesque miniature. *John Allison*

PERFORMANCE ★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Saint-Saëns

Music for Two Pianos

Artur Pizarro & Ludovico Troncanetti (piano)
SOMM SOMMCD0693 72:45 mins

SOMM
PIZARRO & TRONCANETTI
SAINT-SAËNS

The piano was central to Saint-Saëns's creativity. His own breathtaking virtuosity is reflected in the instrument underpinning much of a compositional output that naturally includes a scattering of pieces for two pianos. This charming new album from Artur Pizarro and Ludovico Troncanetti handily gathers together the five original pieces with two of Saint-Saëns's numerous arrangements for two pianos of his orchestral works. Presented chronologically, there is less sense of evolving style than is found in, say, his piano concertos or symphonies. The *Caprice héroïque* of 1898 has little to mark it out from the transcription of the 1870 *Marche héroïque*. The *Caprice arabe* of 1894 is fun, but lacks the striking sonorities found in the 'Egyptian' Fifth Piano Concerto from two years later despite similar inspiration.

Delicate touch: pianist Barry Douglas charms with his Schubert selection

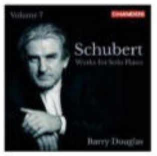
Being Saint-Saëns, though, this ultimately matters little, for the music is never less than exceptionally well written and, especially in these performances, full of *joie-de-vivre*. Playing on Bechstein and Steinway pianos from 1924 and 1925 respectively, Pizarro and Troncanetti create a gorgeous glow at the opening of the composer's transcription of the orchestral poem *Le Rouet d'Omphale*. They extract an enticing warmth from the instruments' lower registers, giving the *Polonaise* the rounded solidity and comfort of old oak furniture. There may be an occluded quality to the overall sound, but higher textures, such as in the 1889 *Scherzo*, are full of sparkling colours. The substantial *Variations on a Theme of Beethoven* feels like an imposter at this party, merely because Saint-Saëns is so good at evoking his hero's style. Like the other works, it is certainly in good hands with Pizarro and Troncanetti. *Christopher Dingle*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Schubert

Piano Sonatas Nos 8 & 18 etc (Works for Solo Piano, Vol. 7)

Barry Douglas (piano)
Chandos CHAN 20289 77:55 mins



Barry Douglas once expressed an aversion to single-composer albums, but he's clearly recanted, making a prolific recording career with Chandos out of such things. He's produced a set of Brahms's complete works, and is now producing a growing series of Schubert albums including many works which are seldom performed. His default style is a slightly austere transparency, and it's often exquisitely poetic.

And so it is with the first sonata on this release. This congenial work, composed in 1817, asks for a particularly light touch. And Douglas gives it that – to the point where one might almost be listening to a fortepiano. His delivery of the first movement is charm incarnate, and the touch he employs for the second, with its lied-like theme, is embroidered with great delicacy.

The pensive chordal opening to the G major sonata, composed in 1826, almost echoes the opening of Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto. But it then embarks on an 18-minute journey of harmonic exploration, and that puts me in mind of Alfred Brendel's observation that, to satisfactorily appreciate this piece, one must listen 'with the assurance of a sleepwalker'. Douglas uses the pauses to stress the questioning nature of this piece.

In the liner note, Brian Newbould – Schubert's best biographer – unpicks the structure of the second movement of this sonata to show that it is both a *Rondo*, and also two interlocking sets of variations which are finally neatly resolved. And it's nice to be told that Schubert's *Gretchen am Spinnrade* was ecstatically hailed on its appearance by one leading critic as 'something new, of unprecedented power... the first modern German song'. Liszt's transcription of 'Wohin?', made in 1846, reflects the power with which new piano manufacturers invested their instrument, decades after Schubert's death. *Michael Church*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Schumann

Abegg; Carnaval; Intermezzi; Papillons

Charles Owen (piano)
Avie AV2647 73:15 mins

CHARLES OWEN
THE YOUNG SCHUMANN

The early piano music of Robert Schumann has inspired countless readings. Charles Owen's new album combines *Carnaval*, Op. 9 with *Papillons*, Op. 2, and (less frequently heard) the *Intermezzi*, Op. 4 and the *Abegg-Variations*, Op. 1.

Carnaval, a depiction of fantasy figures at a masked ball, opens with a witty 'Préambule', but Owen's cast of characters sounds classier than Schumann's. 'Pierrot' is less lumpish; 'Arlequin' less whimsical, 'Coquette' and 'Chiarina' a touch stricter, 'Papillons' less volatile than we expect. 'Valse Noble', 'Réplique' and 'Chopin' are beautifully voiced (and this is a feature overall). The ferociously difficult 'Reconnaissance' is played with delicacy and charm. But those pieces marked *Presto* (or faster) lack the necessary harum-scarum

G. RIZZOTTI, BEN EALOVEGA

quality, despite Owen's polished virtuosity. The penultimate *vivo precipitandosi* before the 'March of the Davidsbündler' does not feel especially precipitous.

Hazier pedalling at the start of *Papillons* evokes Schumann's alternatingly madcap and dreamy world more fully. But here, too, brasher accents and wilder tempos would help lift the music off the page. The softer pieces work beautifully: the *Semplice* section of No. 7 is magical, the *Prestissimo* of No. 9 breathlessly breakneck.

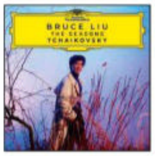
The Op. 4 *Intermezzi*, though rarely heard, share this strange soundworld, and No. 5 is especially impressive here. The closing *Abegg-Variations* again include some gorgeously inward, soft playing. Generally, the recorded quality is crystal clear and warm, though a wider recorded dynamic range might help put across Owen's vision more fully.

Overall, this playing is meticulous, clean and restrained, a saner rendition of Robert Schumann's own mercurial, alternatingly introspective and exuberant character. But even if Owen's Schumann is better-behaved than we expect, the beautifully judged voicing and colours are a delight. *Natasha Loges*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★

Tchaikovsky

The Seasons
Bruce Liu (piano)
DG 486 6050 50:46 mins



Few interpretations rule themselves out of the reckoning so promptly with the first phrase – the first note, even, as Bruce Liu puts an invisible *tenuto* over the opening F sharp. It's not *piano*, the lines are anything but *semplice* as Tchaikovsky asks. His months (as *The Seasons* should more properly be called) aren't of a high technical difficulty, but they need a natural way with their ineffable and utterly characteristic melodies, and though Liu finds that occasionally – 'March' and 'May' are better – the typical rising minor scales of 'June's *Barcarolle*, the most famous of the 12 pieces feel too slow and affected, and the vintage lament of 'October' drags. There's no *con grazia*, no observation of the hairpins in the phrasing. Liu's chief quality is clarity, and that helps with the livelier numbers – the 'February' carnival and the 'September' hunt have plenty of vivacity – but the tone isn't rounded enough, and Liu favours too many staccatos, too few genuinely soft passages; more often than not this is what Shostakovich might disparagingly have called a 'mezzo-fortist' performance.

Turn to Pavel Kolesnikov on Hyperion and right from that same first phrase for 'January', you find the tender poetry that's missing here. Not that Kolesnikov doesn't take some liberties – so did Rachmaninov in his wonderful recording of the November sleigh ride – but you're pulled in to the various imaginative worlds so much more affectingly. Liu has one addition, the F minor *Romance*, Kolesnikov the *Six Morceaux*, Op. 19, amounting to a full half hour's worth of extra music, and fascinating, too. Sadly, this is a non-starter. *David Nice*

PERFORMANCE ★★
RECORDING ★★★

Beethoven Blues

Improvisation by Jon Batiste, inspired by Beethoven
Jon Batiste (piano)
Verve/Interscope 7526380 49:37 mins

JON BATISTE
BEETHOVEN BLUES

Jon Batiste's exploration of Beethoven's music through improvisation at the piano continues an idea that has been looked at many times throughout history; classical musicians from Bach onwards were known as great improvisers, using themes from contemporary and past sources. In the 20th century, jazz musicians delved further; Duke Ellington with Tchaikovsky, Jacques Loussier with Bach and so on. Batiste's offering specifically marries the themes of Beethoven with his own ideas, sometimes spilling into completely original compositions but always referring to the music of his roots – the specific references of which are many and often fleeting. His personal influences are close to the surface however, with all the inspirations one would expect from a contemporary, conservatoire-trained composer.

Contemporary influences are evident from the opening 'Für Elise' which Batiste infuses with blues and gospel licks. This particular representation however doesn't stray far from the original structure or tune; further adventures are saved for later on the album. 'Symphony No. 5 Stomp' demonstrates a little of this with some gorgeous phrasing, and an outrageously sudden, humorous ending. The segueing of 'Moonlight Sonata' and Batiste's own 'Dusklight' show deep thought and space and 'Waldstein Wobble' is a playful Boogie Woogie, bursting with ideas. There is a sense throughout however that much of this project has been hastily put together; the recording quality is sometimes disappointing (too close placement of the microphone) and although obviously musical, at times this sounds like a personal, creative practice session, rather than a concept carefully crafted for public consumption. *Anne Templer*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★

Tango, Mon Amour!

Piazzolla: Libertango; Romance del Diablo; Lo Que Vendrá etc;
plus works by Aieta, Bardi, Dames, Mendizábal, Salgán and Osvaldo Piro
Maria Martinova (piano)
Rubicon RCD1121 55:20 mins

Tango, Mon Amour!
Maria Martinova

Pianist Maria Martinova prefers not to sit still, creatively speaking. Her bold interpretations of Debussy and Ravel in her debut solo album, *Nuit et Jour*, certainly divided the critics, with reviews equally befuddled by Martinova's idiosyncratic sleeve notes. This appealing (if slightly relentless) second solo recording charts a new course for the pianist, as Martinova turns her attention to the Argentinian tango.

Martinova has a longstanding relationship with the tango, having first encountered the form in New York while a student. After a rigorous schedule of dance lessons, she began hunting out scores of piano transcriptions in Buenos Aires and soon discovered that 'Piazzolla is only the tip of the iceberg.' From here, she immersed herself in the music of other masters of the form, including gifted composers and arrangers Horacio Salgán and Orlando Trípodi (as with jazz, tango 'standards' often become famous through a particular arrangement).

The album opens to the evocative bustle and chatter of a tango club, before settling into a run of 12 (studio-recorded) tracks, which are mostly contemporary arrangements of tango standards, including two Piazzolla arrangements by Martinova herself. Martinova's playing is technically dazzling but the ferocious energy she brings to the repertoire can at times feel a little overwhelming. It is certainly a relief to land on softer numbers such as José Dames' *Fuimos*, heard in a rather deft arrangement by Leonardo Teruggi.

Martinova must however be commended for her uncompromising approach to this rich repertoire: she is evidently utterly committed to the form. As such, this explosively expressive album is not for the faint-hearted – but given this is the tango, perhaps that's just the way it should be.
Kate Wakeling

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★

BACKGROUND TO...
Tchaikovsky's *The Seasons*

These 12 piano pieces (one for each month of the year) were commissioned by Nikolay Bernard, the editor of a Russian music magazine. He envisaged each issue of 1876 including a new piano work by Tchaikovsky – Bernard himself came up with the subtitles, approved by the composer. Composition was squeezed in (apparently in three batches) around other things between late 1875 and the early summer of 1876. The June-December pieces weren't begun until April 1876 due to the small matter of Tchaikovsky having to finish work on *Swan Lake*.

GETTY

Jazz

Barry Witherden's set features some giants of the genre in great live recordings

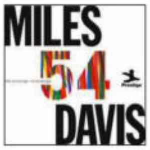
January round-up

In any context (and here it is the quartet ***Satori***) saxophonist Josephine Davies solos with a sinuous elegance that always fits perfectly and is invested with a quiet commitment. For her, ***Weatherwards*** is particularly personal as it evokes aspects of Shetland, where she grew up. Although she moved away while still young she says, 'I am forever drawn back and those wild windswept edges inspired this music.' Her suite of compositions here depicts the island's landscape, traditions and legends, ranging from tempestuous to bluesy and potently mysterious and evocative. *(Whirlwind WR 4822)* ★★★★

Satori
Weatherwards
Josephine Davies

Recorded in August 2020 ***Mike Chillingworth***'s ***Friday The Thirteenth*** has been worth waiting for. On six gritty original compositions, plus Steve Swallow's *Ladies in Mercedes*, Chillingworth (saxes) is joined by Ivo Neame (piano), Tom Farmer (bass) and Jon Scott (drums). I guess neo-post-hard-bop will do as a label but there is a range of moods: including slightly melancholy and spooky, and menace on the soprano feature, *Sync Or Swim*. *Keep It Simple* is pretty fierce and *Coach Trip Special* is swaggering and fragmented by turns, but there are reflective lyrical passages too. *(Ubuntu Music UBUOO 174)* ★★★★

Miles Davis 54: The Prestige Recordings represents a stage in Davis's development when his playing was evolving from Dizzy Gillespie discipleship to an original personal vision. Fellow trumpeter Art Farmer observed, 'when you're not technically a virtuoso you have to say something' and Davis was able to command some of the most distinguished pioneers of modern jazz, who recognised that he really was saying something rich and fresh. This period of Davis's development tends to be eclipsed by his later work but it's high-quality stuff, with fine contributions from Horace Silver and Sonny Rollins in particular. This 2-CD set presents all Davis's 1954 Prestige recordings except the 6 March session. *(Prestige 888072572478)* ★★★★★



Recording Rites by ***The Occasional Quintet*** would be classed as free improvisation rather than jazz but it pushes most of the same buttons for me, not least a sense of the unexpected and real-time spontaneous interaction between the musicians. Although the six tracks are mostly fairly abstract and sometimes ferocious they are, overall, atmospheric, full of interesting exchanges of ideas occasionally resolving into appealing lyrical passages. The session was recorded live at the Ashburton Arts Centre on Dartmoor, an atmospheric, characterful place itself. *(Discus 184CD)* ★★★★

Bird In Kansas City finds ***Charlie Parker*** on 13 rare recordings, most previously unissued. The earliest date from 1941 when he was still in Jay McShann's band, the latest from 1951. Taken from private recordings with unidentified local musicians, the sound is medium-fi but Parker's inspiration dial is turned up high, exploiting the opportunity to stretch out much more than he could on commercial recordings at the time. Apart from three takes of his own piece *Bird Song* the repertoire comprises standards, which Bird transforms into bebop treasures, although on *Body and Soul* and *My Heart Tells Me* he evokes masters of an earlier era. Truck-loads of similar collections have been released but this stands out for broadening our view of Parker. *(Verve 6804735)* ★★★★★

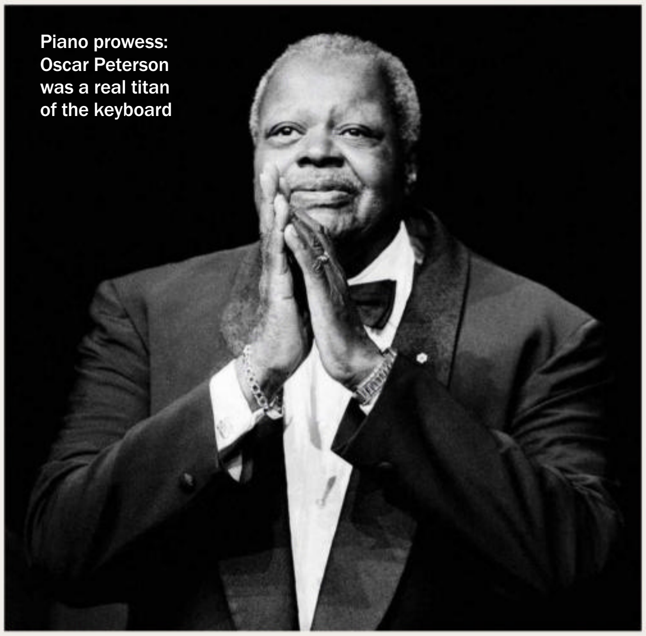
BIRD
CHARLIE
IN
PARKER
KANSAS
CITY

GETTY

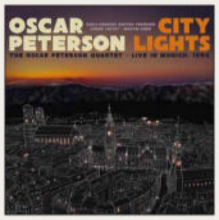
JAZZ CHOICE

Joyous Oscar Peterson

This live recording from 1994 showcases the great pianist's quartet in truly uplifting style



Piano prowess: Oscar Peterson was a real titan of the keyboard



City Lights

The Oscar Peterson Quartet Live in Munich, 1994

Oscar Peterson (piano); Lorne Lofsky (guitar); Niels-Henning Orsted Pedersen (bass); Martin Drew (drums)

Mack Avenue/Two Lions MAC1212

Oscar Peterson holds a special place in my memory and heart as the first concert I ever went to (more decades ago than I care to recall) and it featured what was then his recently revamped trio. Although he fronted some distinguished duos and trios, it was relatively rare for him to lead a quartet; but that's the format for *City Lights*, which was recorded at a 1994 concert in Munich, where he led Danish bassist Niels-Henning Orsted Pedersen, British drummer Martin Drew and his Canadian compatriot Lorne Lofsky on guitar. There are those who consider his style too extravagant: he rarely left gaps and favoured busy, flowery, complicated lines, but these always made good musical and emotional sense. He could play delicately, too, as on *The Gentle Waltz* and *Love Ballade* in this set. The *Ballade* evokes Classical/Romantic works – Peterson had practised classical studies as a child. In contrast, he could build a taut basic funky blues when he chose: witness *Kelly's Blues* here. In these dark days such rich, uplifting music (sometimes joyous and exuberant, sometimes reflective and calming) is not to be sneezed at. ★★★★★

18+

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Brief notes

This month's selection of shorter reviews has rockers, requiems and a cappella

Sacred sounds: Víkingur Ólafsson continues to impress in Bach

JS Bach Arias, Cantatas (arr. Ólafsson) (Continuum)

Víkingur Ólafsson (piano)
DG 4866251 (EP)

Víkingur Ólafsson's commitment to the works of Bach continues unabated in *Continuum*, six arrangements of the composer's sacred pieces – four by the pianist himself. The sound is gently cushioned – yet these unadorned, even stark versions also reveal the beautiful scaffolding of Bach's contrapuntal writing. It's all very reverent and considered, and none the worse for it. (CS) ★★★★

Matt Cook Braveship

Mirusia (soprano); Azra's Orchestra
Orchid Classics ORC100319

Braveship is supposedly a book and video game project, though neither seems yet to exist. Cook is credited with the 'story' here, too, though there's no narration and no album booklet. There's no denying that this is wonderfully tuneful symphonic music worthy of a Hollywood blockbuster of old, though, and the production values are very high. Curious. (MB) ★★★

Fauré Violin Concerto; Orchestral Works

Pierre Fouchenneret (violin) et al; RTÉ National Symphony/Jean-Luc Tingaud
Naxos 8.574587

A victim of Fauré's hectic work schedule, his Violin Concerto was never finished, but the first movement, heard here, gives glimpses of what might have been – gently melodious and blessed with some lovely dialogue between soloist and orchestra, it satisfies rather than sizzles. Orchestral arrangements of more familiar Fauré complete an enjoyable programme. (JP) ★★★

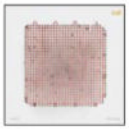
Matthew Owain Jones String Quartet No. 1 etc

Ensemble Midtvest
FHR FHR163

Begun when he was 19, Jones's String Quartet is instantly captivating: with more than a whiff of Barber, there are suspensions galore in the *Andante*, while the *Allegro* channels Glass-like minimalism. His Wind Quintet, composed in 2016, is more mature, but no less attractive – while the chamber arrangements from Nielsen's *Aladdin* are boisterous, energetic fun. (CS) ★★★★

Pete Judge Piano 3

Pete Judge (piano)
CRD CRD3550



It seems Bristol-based musician Pete Judge is a man of many talents. I know him first and foremost as a jazz trumpeter, but this (evidently his third) piano album of original miniatures reveals him to be a most thought-provoking and deep-feeling composer. Hints of his jazz (and folk) roots appear as glimmers, with rhythm and invention part and parcel of his style here, but this humble composer has a real knack for creating stillness and beauty, too. (MB) ★★★★

Andrew Lloyd Webber Requiem; plus Barber: Adagio for Strings

Soraya Mafi (soprano), Benjamin Bruns (tenor); Bavarian Radio Chorus; Munich Radio Orchestra/Patrick Hahn
BR Klassik 900352

Written in tribute to the composer's late father, Andrew Lloyd Webber's Requiem has largely been overlooked. This 2023 live recording is, then, a much-needed resurrection ahead of the work's 40th anniversary. Lloyd Webber's gift for lyrical drama is evident, but there's emotional depth and complexity too, aided by this stirring performance. (MB) ★★★★

Mozart Piano Concertos Nos 9 & 21; Rondo for Piano and Orchestra

Dejan Lazić (piano); Bergen Philharmonic/Jan Willem de Vriend
Challenge Classics CC72946

This agreeable second instalment in an intended Mozart piano concertos trilogy features self-penned cadenzas by the pianist – interesting departures in style from the main works, but always elegantly played. Lazić dispatches Mozart's often tricky passagework with a beautiful, ringing tone and clearly articulated ease, but the vibrato-less accompanying strings sometimes seem a little dull in comparison. (CS) ★★★★

Prokofiev • Rimsky-Korsakov • Tsfasman Works for Piano and Orchestra

Zlata Chochieva (piano); BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra/
Karl-Heinz Steffens
Naïve V8448

A bold choice to place Prokofiev at his most ferocious – both in terms of temperament and technical demands – between Romantic Rimsky-Korsakov and light-hearted fun from a leading Soviet jazz composer, but it works well. Zlata Chochieva and the BBC Scottish Symphony electrify in the Prokofiev, just as they charm and delight in the outer two works. (JP) ★★★★★

R Strauss Ein Heldenleben; Don Juan

Brussels Philharmonic/Kazushi Ono
Evil Penguin EPRC 0067

This live recording comes complete with shuffling, sniffing and even humming! But it all adds to a sense of concert hall excitement. If the sound is sometimes a little soupy, there are lovely solos from the lead violin and a great sense of distance from the offstage brass – and the orchestra often achieves real passion. (CS) ★★★

Andy Summers Vertiginous Canyons

Andy Summers (guitar)
Blue Cloud Music ORC100332

Former guitarist of The Police, Summers wrote this eight-movement suite to accompany *A Series of Glances*, his book of photos from around the world. Largely improvised and then electronically manipulated in various ways, the music floats ambiently without ever

Piano with pizzazz: Zlata Chochieva is electric in Prokofiev's Second Concerto

heading anywhere in particular. It probably needs the visual stimulus to make it really come to life. (JP) ★★★

Rick Wakeman

Yessonata; The King Arthur Piano Suite

Rick Wakeman (piano)

Fragile Records FR1CD101

If you're a Yes fan, part of the fun of the 20-minute *Yessonata* is, of course, trying to spot the various songs lurking within. But even without that added attraction, it hangs together quite nicely as a piece – albeit in Wakeman's trademark rambly and twiddly-widdly style – as does the similar-length *The King Arthur Piano Suite* that follows. (JP) ★★★★

American Woman

Works by Beach, Bonds, Crane, Howe, Price et al

Juliana Soltis (cello), Ruoting Li (piano)

Navona NV6659

There are some wonderful unsung composers to be discovered here, thanks to Soltis and Li's loving curation and heartfelt musicianship. Mary Howe's *Ballade Fantasque* and Helen Crane's *Six Idylls* shine brightly, while Florence Price's sweetly eloquent *Adoration* tops things off beautifully. A gem. (MB) ★★★★

Close Harmony

Songs by Elton John et al

The King's Singers

Signum Classics SIGCD912 (2CD)

This double album gathers together recordings previously released as EPs called 'The Library' alongside some new cuts by the ever-popular *a cappella* ensemble. It's certainly a generous helping and there is no denying the artistry of both the singers and arrangers. It's a heady mix from 'Crocodile Rock' to *The Barber of Seville*, though the highlight is surely 'Master-piece', the lyrics a hotchpotch of composer names, works and music terms. (MB) ★★★

The Golden Age of the Horn

Concertos for Two Horns by Hoffmeister, L Mozart et al

Jacek Muzyk, Daniel Kerdelewicz (horn); Buffalo Phil/JoAnn Falletta

Naxos 8.574646

It's rare to hear solo horn in the concert hall, and these elegant but taxing 18th-century double concertos demonstrate just why. The Leopold Mozart is the album's highlight – its sophisticated interplay between soloists and orchestra genuinely tickles the ear. If the remaining works are plainer, there's still much to enjoy as this mellow instrument takes centre stage. (CS) ★★★

Minimalist

Works by Górecki, Holt, Kancheli, Kilar, Philip Glass, Szymon Nehring and Arvo Pärt

Szymon Nehring (piano); Polish Radio Orchestra in Warsaw/Michal Klauza

IBS Classical IBS132024

Polish pianist Szymon Nehring captivates in this survey of Minimalist works, with Philip Glass perhaps the most obvious presence. Hypnotic solo pieces by Arvo Pärt and Simeon Ten Holt are highlights both, while the Piano Concerto by the late Wojciech Kilar is a real discovery for me, providing an ethereal closing statement. (MB) ★★★★

The Norwegian Seasons

Works by Vivaldi, Marais and Agnes Ida Pettersen

Ragnhild Hemsing (violin); Barokkanerne

Berlin Classics 0303416BC

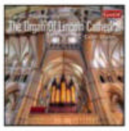
This exciting experiment reimagines Vivaldi's *Seasons* on the Hardanger fiddle, and highlights a delightful symmetry between Italian Baroque and Norwegian folk. The burnished timbre and beautiful ornamentation – often sounding free and improvised – utterly transform these much-loved works, and the mercurial changes of mood, from barely-there barrenness to rushes of unbridled energy, are fascinating. A triumph. (CS) ★★★★★

The Organ of Lincoln Cathedral

Works by Vierne and Tournemire

Colin Walsh (organ)

Guild GMCD7833



Vierne's First Organ Symphony and Tournemire's Five Improvisations – a thrilling work that the composer refused to write down but was reconstructed from the recording of his own performance – make an ideal pair for showcasing the many colours of Lincoln's mighty Father Willis organ, not least as the Vierne is a close contemporary of the instrument. In such a reverberant acoustic, some of the detail inevitably gets a little lost, not least in the famous *Final* of the Vierne, but it is nonetheless a stirring listen. (JP) ★★★★

Sorcellerie

Works by Liszt, de Falla, Dukas and Mussorgsky

Duo Jatekok

Alpha Classics ALPHA1083

There is all sorts of wizardry on show here, as the admirable Duo Jatekok cast their spell with arrangements of familiar pieces by Liszt, de Falla, Dukas and Mussorgsky. Though Saint-Saëns's two-piano version of Liszt's B Minor Sonata doesn't add much to the one-piano original, the magical thrills and spills of the other works are captured nicely. (JP) ★★★★

Michael Beek (MB), Jeremy Pound (JP), Charlotte Smith (CS)

Folk and fire: Ragnhild Hemsing triumphs in *The Norwegian Seasons*

MARKUS JANS, UWE ARENS, CATHRINE DOKKEN

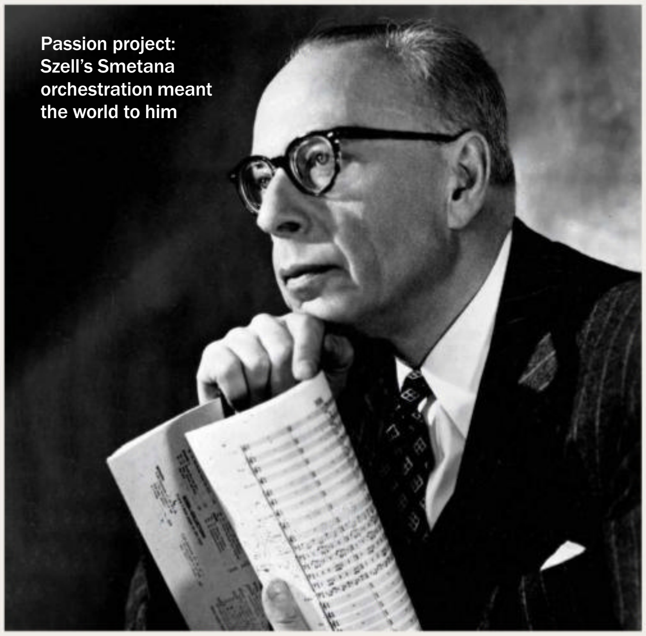
From the archives

Andrew McGregor looks over this month's reissued and live archive recordings

ARCHIVE CHOICE

A bicentennial bounty

Smetana's 200th is upon us and these 1940s recordings from George Szell are cherishable



Passion project: Szell's Smetana orchestration meant the world to him

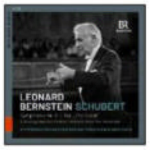
Smetana

String Quartet No. 1 (arr. Szell); The Bartered Bride – Overture; Má Vlast – excerpts etc (Smetana 200)
NBC Symphony Orchestra; Boston Symphony Orchestra/George Szell
SOMM ARIADNE 5032 74:34 mins

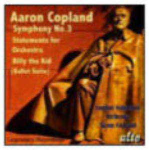
Did you know that Hungarian conductor George Szell had a profound passion for the music of pioneering Czech composer Bedřich Smetana? Szell worked in Prague early in his career, and when he left war-torn Europe for America in 1939, Smetana's music went with him. Without conducting engagements in New York, Szell at last had time to spend on a project he'd had in his head for years: orchestrating Smetana's autobiographical String Quartet No. 1 'From My Life'. It became a calling card for Szell as a guest conductor in the USA, and the confessional passion of the piece plays out thrillingly on this larger canvas, adapted by a conductor who has the sound of Smetana's orchestral music in his veins. This was the world premiere, a live studio recording with the NBC Symphony Orchestra in 1941, alongside a rip-roaring performance of the Overture to *The Bartered Bride* and a fiercely flowing *Vltava*. Also from *Má Vlast* is 'Bohemia's Woods and Fields', with the Boston Symphony Orchestra live in 1945. Remastered with gritty immediacy, this has to be one of the most intriguing offerings for Smetana's 200th birthday. ★★★★

January round-up

As far as I know, Szell (see Choice) never performed all six tone poems of Smetana's ***Má Vlast***, unlike Czech conductor ***Rafael Kubelík***, who made at least five recordings, the earliest in Chicago in 1952 on Mercury. For the Smetana bicentenary, Gramola has dug out Kubelík's Vienna Philharmonic recording for Decca in 1958, but despite his obvious passion and deep connection with the music, this doesn't take flight with the consistent mastery and sense of occasion offered by Kubelík and the Czech Phil live at the Prague Spring Festival in 1990, and in better sound. (*Gramola 92005*) ★★★



Leonard Bernstein began an annual series of concerts with the Bavarian Radio Symphony in Munich in the 1980s, and here's Schubert's 'Great' ***C Major Symphony No. 9*** (No. 8 in the New Schubert Edition) in concert in June 1987, just a few months before his last recording of it with the Concertgebouw. Fine playing, but full-fat sound and deliberate tempos. The rehearsal recording is fascinating for the way Bernstein engages the players with his passion, singing, vocalisations, the surprisingly idiomatic German and the growling praise for the players. 'Dies ist Schubert...nicht Mahler, nicht Ives. Give it all you've got...Wunderschön!' (*BR Klassik 900229*) ★★★



Now here's American composer ***Aaron Copland*** conducting his own music with the London Symphony Orchestra in the late 1950s, and this classic account of the ***Symphony No. 3*** has always been on Copland collectors' radar. An elusive 'great American symphony' with its last movement based on his *Fanfare for the Common Man*, and a conclusion of epic optimism. Played and recorded with translucent clarity, and a sense of the commitment the players are giving to a composer not renowned as a conductor. The Suite from *Billy the Kid* has just the right swagger, and Copland's earlier *Statements for Orchestra* emerge with the sense of adventure they need. Excellent remastering. (*Alto ALC 1703*) ★★★★

Last month I was full of admiration for ***Mendelssohn*** from the Baltimore Symphony and ***Sergiu Comissiona***, and this next instalment of their 1970s Mendelssohn series is almost as enjoyable, even though the *Hebrides Overture* doesn't match the airborne magic of their *Midsummer Night's Dream*. The 'Italian' Symphony though takes off with invigorating bustle, the final *Saltarello* dances delightfully, and in the 'Reformation' Symphony the sense of religious ceremony emerges powerfully from the opening brass, despite a slightly thin wind and string sound that undermines the emphatically joyful ending. (*VOX-NX-3047CD*) ★★★

András Schiff and Dinu Lipatti play Bach... Not together, of course; these recordings are separated by a quarter-of-a-century, and at opposite ends of their lives. Lipatti died at the end of 1950, aged only 33, the year of these Bach studio sessions. There's an easy fluidity to the Partita No. 1 and a limpid beauty in *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring*. Three years later Schiff was born in Budapest; there's an irrepressible verve in the 'Italian' Concerto he recorded in his mid-20s, and stylish poise and ornamentation in the French Suite No. 5. Bach playing as good as this should never be out of fashion. (*Alto ALC 1702*) ★★★★★

Andrew McGregor is the presenter of Radio 3's *Record Review*, broadcast each Saturday afternoon from 2pm-4pm

Career highlights: Erato's Paavo Järvi box features almost 20 years of releases

Unboxed

This month's round-up features a double helping of Charles Ives and some rather ravishing Ravel

French pianist ***François-Xavier Poizat*** has a deep connection with the music of Ravel, the piano sitting at the heart of much of the composer's music. Poizat honours this with ***The Complete Works with Piano*** (*Aparté AP321*), a handsomely packaged six-disc collection of recordings made by Aparté from 2022-24 and featuring some fantastic performances in addition to Poizat. Joining him for a disc's worth of concertos is the Philharmonia under Simone Menezes, while violinist Michael Foyle and cellist Jamie Walton chip in for a disc of chamber works. Two discs of solo and piano four-hand pieces and two discs of songs wrap up this appealing set.

Sony has released a pair of boxes to mark the 150th anniversary of ***Charles Ives***'s birth – though it's unclear why the five-disc ***Anniversary Edition*** (*Sony Classical 19658885972*) couldn't have been drawn into the 22-disc ***RCA and Columbia Anthology*** (*19658885962*). Both offer riches, with the larger collection offering a tremendous number of works hitherto unreleased on CD. These include a 1950 recording of his Second Violin Concerto and a 1969 take on 24 of his songs. The smaller set features a fascinating disc of 'Ives playing Ives' and one of recorded memories from those who knew him or championed his music, including composer Bernard Herrmann and pianist John Kirkpatrick. From first recordings and stereo 'do-overs' to unheard treasures, the two sets offer a deep dive into one of American music's most singular voices.

Paavo Järvi – The Complete Erato Recordings (*Erato 5419795503*) is rather more varied in terms of the roster of composers covered, such is the range of the Estonian conductor's musical interests. This 31-disc collection is crammed with great performances originally released across 29 albums for Virgin, EMI and Erato made by Järvi with a range of ensembles and soloists from 1996-2015. Everything Järvi takes on is delivered with authority, and this selection is certainly no exception, from Brahms and Mahler to Arvo Pärt and Erkki-Sven Tüür. Estonian composers and musicians are a running theme throughout, Järvi's commitment to championing his birth country's music fully on display. Guest stars include soprano Natalie Dessay, pianist Leif Ove Andsnes and cellist Gautier Capuçon. ***Michael Beek***

GETTY, KAUPO KIKKAS

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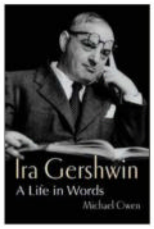
Books

Our critics cast their eyes over the latest selection of books on all things music

Ira Gershwin – A Life in Words

Michael Owen

Liveright 416pp (hb) £30



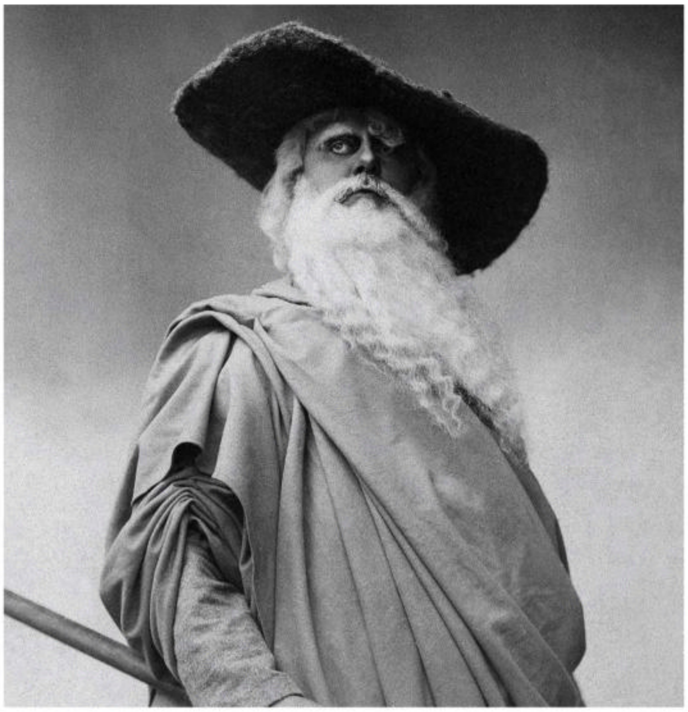
Just as the young George Gershwin discovered an exceptional musical gift, so his elder brother Ira developed a passion for words, in his case beginning with comics, local newspapers and magazines.

He would go on to a brilliant career as a writer of popular song, producing numerous examples in collaboration with his brother. After George's untimely death in 1937, Ira worked on further Broadway shows or musical films with the likes of Kurt Weill and Harold Arlen.

An authority on both the Gershwins, Michael Owen here explores the trajectory of Ira's career (1918-64) as one of the leading purveyors of words written for music; in later years Ira also proved a doughty guardian of his and his brother's legacy.

Being a lyric writer, Ira suggested, required 'a certain dexterity with words and a feeling for music... the infinite patience of the gem setter, compatibility with the composer and an understanding of the various personalities in a cast.'

Interspersing the biography are quotations from classics of the Great American Songbook, showcasing Ira's gift for encapsulating the most delicate emotions in a handful of words. *George Hall* ★★★★



Ring master: Theodor Bertram as Wotan in a 1901 production of Wagner's epic

GETTY

Sergei Rachmaninoff – In His Own Words

Ed. Geoffrey Norris

Wolke 320pp (hb) £30.99

Study hard with the best teachers from an early age, then your imagination can fly: Rachmaninov's advice for pianists and composers is consistent throughout this compendium of interviews (there's less about his conducting, though he makes it clear that as a newspaper-styled 'triple threat', he must focus completely on each gift when so engaged). The sequence begins unpromisingly in 1909 with an unfocused rant against Richard Stauss and 'musical futurists'; Rachmaninov never ceases to excoriate most 'moderns'. What does he truly love? American orchestras, with those in Philadelphia and Boston rated higher than any in Europe; as pianists, Anton Rubinstein and Liszt; as composers whom the Americans don't know well enough, Medtner and Rimsky-Korsakov. The quality of the articles varies from lazy journalists who don't check their facts to the most detailed advice, still valid, on pianism for the American magazine *The Etude*.

SERGEI
RACHMANINOFF
IN HIS OWN
WORDS

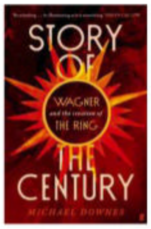
Geoffrey Norris's editing is scrupulous, with articles in two languages where appropriate, though proof errors creep in towards the end. The presentation, under the auspices of the Serge Rachmaninoff Foundation, is handsome. Essential reading. *David Nice* ★★★★

Story of the Century – Wagner and the creation of The Ring

Michael Downes

Faber 336pp (hb) £22

Do we really need another canter through Wagner's career? This very readable book shows there's still life in the genre. Downes keeps his focus on how the *Ring* emerged, and why it was and remains so revolutionary; in a deft paragraph he suggests why everything from Ukraine and Gaza to climate change and the war between Biden and Trump (aka Wotan and Alberich) serves to make the *Ring* as topical today as it ever was.



Downes looks at Wagner's early operatic forays and his literary and philosophical influences, and he pinpoints the evolution of the *Ring*'s poetry and the kind of drama to which it gave rise. Downes's musical commentary is both perceptive and evocative, dealing in turn with timbre, pitch, rhythm and harmony, and he's informative on Wagner's instrumental inventions; he writes illuminatingly about the function of the leitmotifs. Drawing on Wagner's *Mein Leben* and Cosima Wagner's diaries, he creates a vivid picture of the evolution of the original production, and its afterlife in America and (fatefully) in Germany.

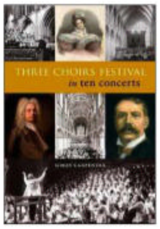
With extended advice on further reading, viewing and listening, this will be the perfect book for Wagnerite beginners. *Michael Church* ★★★★★

Three Choirs Festival in Ten Concerts

Simon Carpenter

Logaston Press 162pp (pb) £12.99

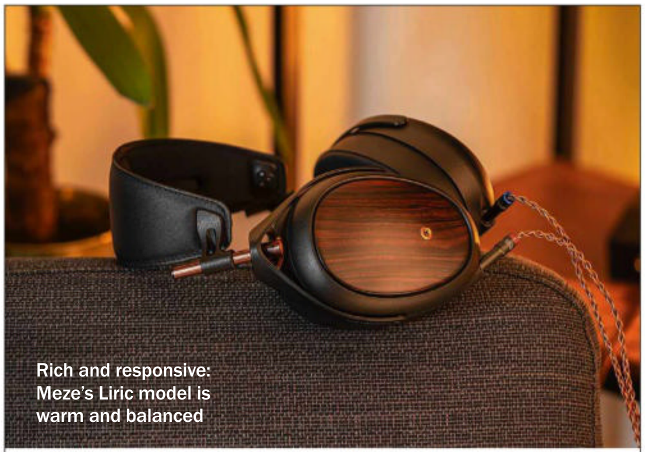
Dating back to the start of the 18th century, the annual Three Choirs Festival – held in rotation between the cathedral cities of Gloucester, Worcester and Hereford – boasts a history that younger festivals can only envy. Here, Simon Carpenter picks out ten notable concerts from that history – not least the world premieres of Elgar's *Froissart* Overture (1890) and Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* (1910) – and, along the way, highlights various local heroes and details how the event has developed over the years. As the festival's volunteer archivist, Carpenter has a wealth of material to draw on, and some of the contemporary newspaper reports and reviews are highly illuminating (and often amusing too), whether repeatedly questioning the ability of cathedral organists to conduct an orchestra or, in 1969, welcoming the introduction of applause after 250 years of audience silence. Admittedly, his prose and presentation can be a little clunky – for instance, we are told the basic facts about the festival's origins only after being given detailed lists of steward names and performer fees at the 1757 event – but as an introduction to one of the great pillars of British music, it is well worth a read. *Jeremy Pound* ★★★



Audio choice

Our audio expert *Chris Haslam* tests options for luxurious listening in private

THIS MONTH: HIGH-END HEADPHONES



Rich and responsive: Meze's Liric model is warm and balanced

INDULGENT AUDIO

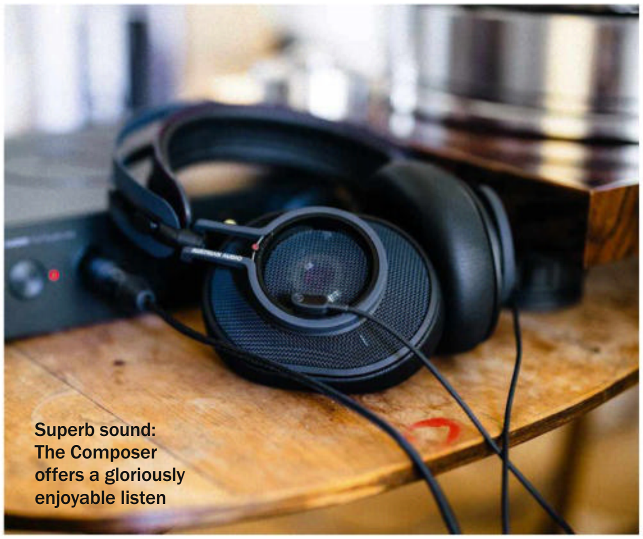
Meze Audio Liric 2nd Generation £1, 850

These beautiful headphones feature advanced hand-assembled planar magnetic drivers that offer a faster, more uniform response than traditional dynamic drivers. The Quarter Wavelength Resonator Mask offers a rich bass response and impressive sense of space, with instrumentation of the orchestra brilliantly realised in almost 3D. They're warm and balanced, but there is also plenty of attack when needed. Sonically I can't fault them, though they fit better when you're relaxing rather than working – the hinges pivot if you look down at a laptop, for instance. **mezeaudio.eu**

IMPRESSIVE WIRELESS OPTION

Dali IO-8 £599

Like many high-end speaker brands, Dali has branched into the lucrative headphone market, and despite being restricted by Bluetooth, the audio quality of the IO-8 is almost on a par with a wired pair. They have generous 50mm full-range dynamic drivers with 10Hz-43kHz frequency response and a big 30hr battery life – and that's with active noise cancellation turned on. If you're at home or have a DAC or headphone amp, you can plug in to get the very best from these headphones, but in truth, wirelessly (Bluetooth 5.2, aptX HD) they effortlessly open up the orchestra in front of you, pulling out detail in an entertaining way. **dali-speakers.com**



Superb sound: The Composer offers a gloriously enjoyable listen

SENSATIONAL QUALITY

Austrian Audio The Composer £2,249

BBC MUSIC MAGAZINE BEST BUY

Following in the footsteps of Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and Mahler, these aptly named headphones are engineered and made in Vienna, Austria. They won 'Best High-End Headphones' at the 2024 EISA (Expert Imaging and Sound Association) Awards, and since receiving my review sample I've barely taken them off.

Tested here using Qobuz (qobuz.com) hi-resolution recordings and Austrian Audio's The Full Score (£1,299) headphone amplifier, I find these open-backed headphones to be a gloriously enjoyable listen. They leak sound, so are definitely for at-home solo listening (the best kind), but this restriction gives you the chance to indulge in your favourite concertos – and with the depth of detail, rhythm and drive like you've never experienced before. For a relatively new brand, they've created a premium audiophile product that happily competes with, and challenges, the established brands in the industry. And they're even verging on being 'good value' compared to many of those headphones that also manage to sound this fine.

Unlike the majority of big stay-at-home headphones, The Composer weighs just 385g (without cables) and never once felt hefty. The build is predominantly metal, which helps strip out excess, and the earpads apply hardly any pressure to the side of the head. My only criticism is the lack of adjustability. They fit me well on the smallest setting (and I have a big head) but they absolutely swamp my wife, so try before you buy. **austrian.audio**

NEED TO KNOW

Open or closed back? 'Open-back' headphones allow the music to breathe, providing a spacious sound, ideal for expansive soundscapes. 'Closed-back' models offer a focused sound with enhanced bass and less sound leakage.

Source material The more advanced the headphones, the more detail they can reveal. This is where hi-resolution (CD-quality or higher) makes a significant difference. Tidal.com and Qobuz.com have a wide range of hi-res tracks.

Do I need a headphone amp? A standalone headphone amp or DAC can get the best from your headphones, especially for those with high impedance (25 ohms and beyond). Chord (chordelectronics.co.uk), Audiolab (audiolab.co.uk) and iFi (ifi-audio.com) offer a good range.

Which cables? Premium wired headphones come with cables and connectors to pair with amps/DACs. Choose a 1.2m cable for portability and a 2m plus cable for relaxed home listening.

TV&Radio

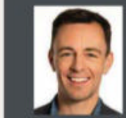
Your guide to what's on BBC Radio 3 this month, plus TV highlights

JANUARY'S RADIO 3 LISTINGS

Schedules may be subject to alteration. For up-to-date listings see BBC Sounds and iPlayer

Three to look out for

Epiphany premiere: Anna Lapwood conducts her own work



Sam Jackson, the controller of BBC Radio 3, selects three programme highlights for the month of January

Epiphany Carol Service

For centuries, the story of the Epiphany has inspired countless composers and musicians. From the chapel of Pembroke College, Cambridge, we're celebrating the arrival of the Three Wise Men with a service that includes a new work written by the college's director of music, Anna Lapwood.
Wednesday 8 January, 3pm

Happy Birthday, Sir Simon!

We're celebrating 70 years of Simon Rattle this month, and on *Opera on 3* you will be able to hear his acclaimed recording of Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen* with the LSO. The work that first made Rattle want to conduct opera, it is, he says, one of very few pieces that reliably reduces him to tears.
Opera on 3, Saturday 18 January, 6pm

Live from Auschwitz

On the day 80 years ago that Red Army troops liberated the survivors at the death camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Petroc Trelawny marks the anniversary with a special programme from the site. All the music in the programme will have some connection to the lives of composers and performers who were affected by the holocaust.
Breakfast, Monday 27 January, 6.30am

1 WEDNESDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-3pm Classical Live
3-4pm Choral Evensong
4-5pm Composer of the Week Franz Schubert
5-7pm Europe Special
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert EBU Vienna
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

2 THURSDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Franz Schubert
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert EBU Paris
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

3 FRIDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Franz Schubert
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert EBU Budapest
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Late Junction
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

4 SATURDAY

6.30-9am Saturday Breakfast
9am-12pm Saturday Morning
12-1pm Earlier... with Jools Holland
1-2pm Music Matters
2-4pm Record Review
4-5pm Sound of Cinema
5-6pm This Classical Life
6-9.30pm Radio 3 In Concert EBU Germany
9.30-10.30pm Music Planet
10.30pm-12.30am New Music Show

5 SUNDAY

6.30-9am Sunday Breakfast
9am-12pm Sunday Morning
12-1.30pm Private Passions
1.30-3pm Music Map
3-4pm Choral Evensong
4-5pm Jazz Record Requests
5-6pm The Early Music Show
6-7.15pm Words and Music
7.15-8pm Sunday Feature
8-10pm Drama on 3 The Dead
10-11.30pm Ultimate Calm

6 MONDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-2pm Live from Wigmore Hall
2-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Michel Legrand
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Royal Festival Hall, London. Brahms *Piano Concerto No.1*, Freya Waley-Cohen *Mother Tongue*, Bartók *The Miraculous Mandarin Suite*. Víkingur Ólafsson (piano), London Philharmonic/Edward Gardner
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

7 TUESDAY

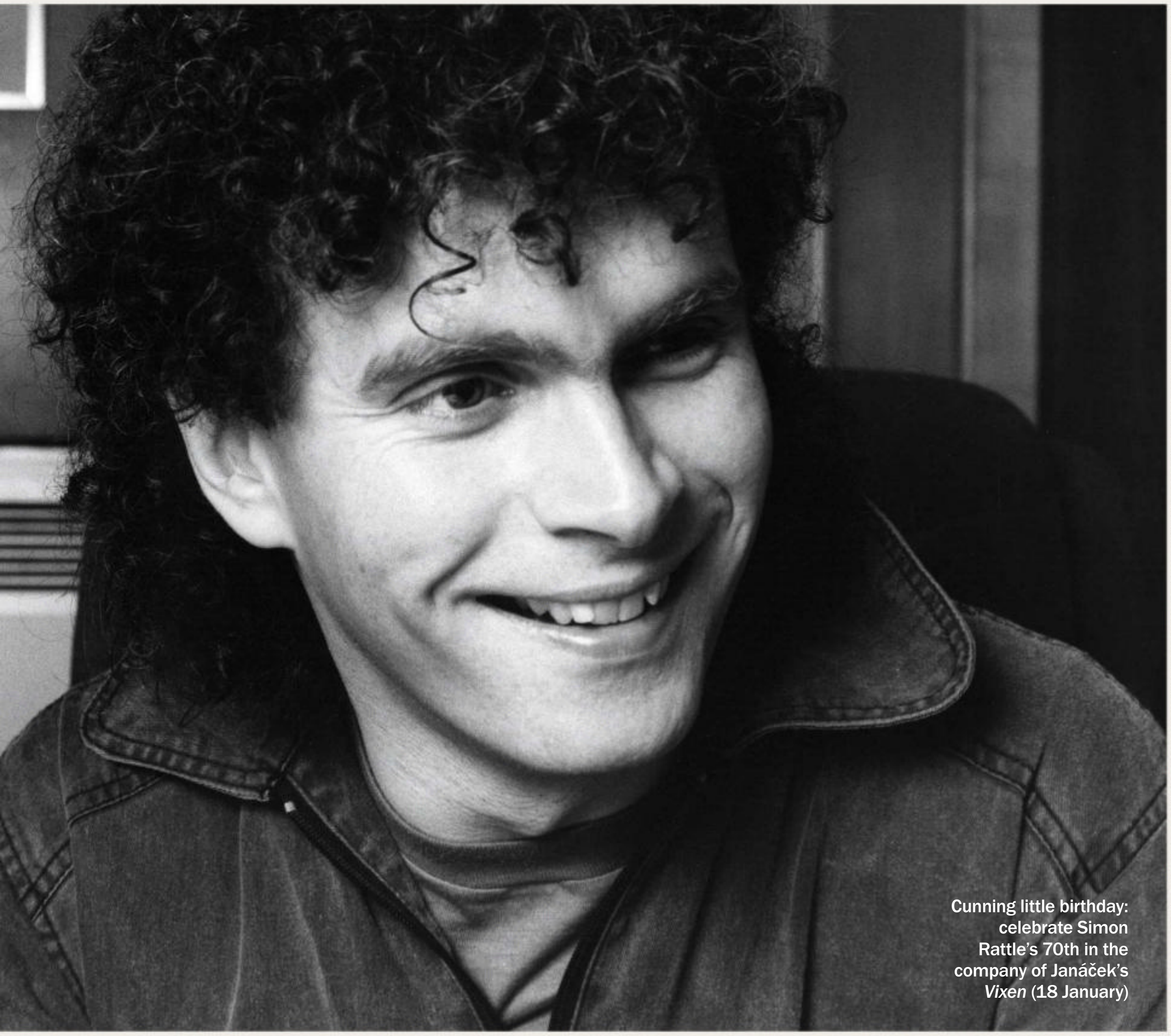
6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Michel Legrand
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Assembly Rooms, Bath. Haydn *String Quartet, Op.50 No.5*, Mozart *String Quartet, K.590*, Brahms *Clarinet Quintet*. Annelien van Wauwe (clarinet), Leonkoro Quartet
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

8 WEDNESDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-3pm Classical Live
CHOICE 3-4pm Choral Evensong
4-5pm Composer of the Week Michel Legrand
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from City Halls, Glasgow. Prokofiev *Symphony No.1, Violin Concerto No.2*, Brahms *Symphony No.2*. Aylen Pritchin (violin), Scottish Chamber Orchestra/Maxim Emelyanychev.
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

9 THURSDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live



Cunning little birthday: celebrate Simon Rattle's 70th in the company of Janáček's *Vixen* (18 January)

GETTY

4-5pm Composer of the Week Michel Legrand
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Barbican, London. Elgar *The Dream of Gerontius*. Sarah Connolly (mezzo), Nicky Spence (tenor), Roderick Williams (baritone). BBC Symphony Chorus, BBC SO/ Sakari Oramo
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

10 FRIDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Michel Legrand
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45 Friday Night is Music Night
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Late Junction
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

11 SATURDAY

6.30-9am Saturday Breakfast
9am-12pm Saturday Morning
12-1pm Earlier... with Jools Holland
1-2pm Music Matters
2-4pm Record Review
4-5pm Sound of Cinema
5-6pm This Classical Life
6-9.30pm Opera on 3
9.30-10.30pm Music Planet
10.30pm-12.30am New Music Show

12 SUNDAY

6.30-9am Sunday Breakfast
9am-12pm Sunday Morning
12-1.30pm Private Passions
1.30-3pm Music Map
3-4pm Choral Evensong
4-5pm Jazz Record Requests
5-6pm The Early Music Show
6-7.15pm Words and Music
7.15-8pm Between the Ears Vincent Van Gogh in Brixton
8-10pm Drama on 3 Gatsby in Harlem
10-11.30pm Ultimate Calm

13 MONDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-2pm Live from Wigmore Hall
2-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Haydn
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Symphony Hall, Birmingham. Mozart *Piano Concerto No. 26*, Bruckner *Symphony No. 9*. Martin Helmchen (piano), City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra/Kazuki Yamada
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

14 TUESDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Haydn
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Royal Concert Hall, Nottingham. Ravel *Boléro*, Thorvaldsdottir *Catamorphosis*, Nielsen *Symphony No. 4 'The Inextinguishable'*. National Youth Orchestra/Jaime Martin
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

15 WEDNESDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-3pm Classical Live
3-4pm Choral Evensong
4-5pm Composer of the Week Haydn
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Barbican, London. Moussa *Elysium*, Haydn *Nelson Mass*, R Strauss *Ein Heldenleben*. Nardus Williams (soprano), BBC Symphony Chorus, BBC SSO/Hannu Lintu
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

16 THURSDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Haydn
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Bridgewater Hall, Manchester. Boulez *Rituel in memoriam Bruno Maderna*, Ravel, orch Hesketh *Sites auriculaires*, Ravel *Pavane pour une infante défunte, Piano Concerto in G, Daphnis and Chloé Suite No.2*. Bertrand Chamayou (piano), BBC Philharmonic/Mark Wigglesworth
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

17 FRIDAY

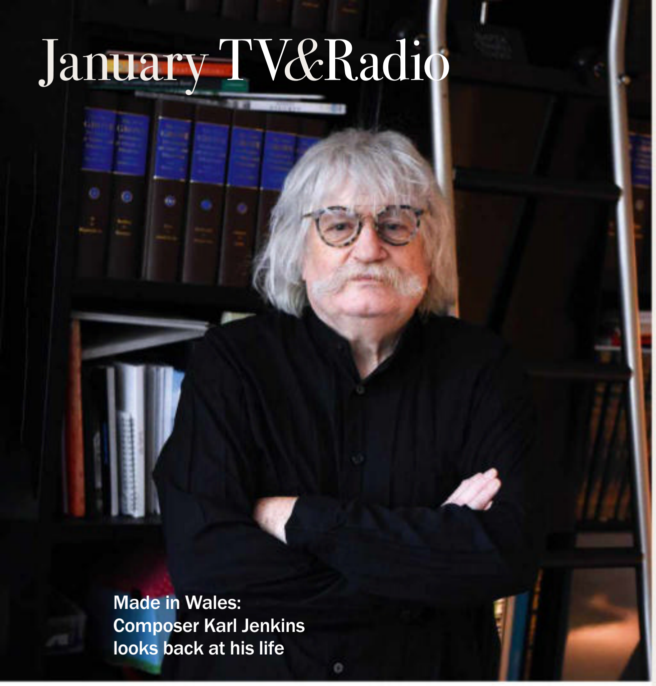
6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Haydn
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Friday Night is Music Night
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Late Junction
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

18 SATURDAY

6.30-9am Saturday Breakfast
9am-12pm Saturday Morning
12-1pm Earlier... with Jools Holland
1-2pm Music Matters
2-4pm Record Review
4-5pm Sound of Cinema
5-6pm This Classical Life
CHOICE 6-9.30pm Opera on 3 Janáček *The Cunning Little Vixen*
9.30-10.30pm Music Planet
10.30pm-12.30am New Music Show

19 SUNDAY

6.30-9am Sunday Breakfast
9am-12pm Sunday Morning
12-1.30pm Private Passions



Made in Wales: Composer Karl Jenkins looks back at his life

TV CHOICE

Karl Jenkins: The Man Behind the Moustache

His signature handlebar may have sparked rumours of a royal disguise at the coronation of Charles III but that's not all he's known for. Karl Jenkins is today's most performed living composer, thanks to genre-defying works such as *Adiemus* and *The Armed Man*. Made in honour of his 80th birthday last year, this documentary pays homage to his career, with stories and archive footage showing the diverse range of influences on his music, from the Methodist hymns of his South Wales childhood to his time in the band Soft Machine. Jenkins also goes on a journey to his grandfather's town in Sweden, plus we hear his own reflections on a life in music, along with the voices of colleagues, fans and fellow musicians such as Bryn Terfel and Kiri Te Kanawa.

BBC iPlayer, available now

1.30-3pm Music Map
3-4pm Choral Evensong
4-5pm Jazz Record Requests
5-6pm The Early Music Show
6-7.15pm Words and Music
7.15-8pm Sunday Feature The Search for a Lost Ugandan Opera
8-10pm Drama on 3 Gatsby in Harlem
10-11pm Ultimate Calm
11-11.30pm Night Tracks Mixtape
11.30pm-12.30am Unclassified

20 MONDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-2pm Live from Wigmore Hall
2-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Imogen Holst
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm The Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Barbican, London. Tippett *Ritual Dances from 'The Midsummer Marriage'*, Turnage *Sco (world premiere)*, Vaughan Williams *Symphony No. 5*. John Scofield (guitar), London Symphony Orchestra/Simon Rattle
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

21 TUESDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Imogen Holst
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

22 WEDNESDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-3pm Classical Live
3-4pm Choral Evensong
4-5pm Composer of the Week Imogen Holst
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Hoddinott Hall, Cardiff. Janáček *The Cunning Little Vixen Suite*, Martinů *Cello Concerto No. 1*, Stravinsky *Petrushka*. Laura van der Heijden (cello), BBC National Orchestra of Wales/Antony Hermus
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

23 THURSDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Imogen Holst
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert live from City Halls, Glasgow. Mozart *Piano Concerto No. 24*, Britten *Suite on English Folk Tunes 'A time there was'*, Vaughan Williams *Symphony No. 4*. Ryan Wigglesworth (piano/conductor), BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

24 FRIDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Imogen Holst
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45 Friday Night is Music Night
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Late Junction
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

25 SATURDAY

6.30-9am Saturday Breakfast
9am-12pm Saturday Morning
12-1pm Earlier... with Jools Holland
1-2pm Music Matters
2-4pm Record Review
4-5pm Sound of Cinema
5-6pm This Classical Life
6-9.30pm Opera on 3 from New York Metropolitan Opera. Puccini *Tosca*
9.30-10.30pm Music Planet
10.30pm-12.30am New Music Show

26 SUNDAY

6.30-9am Sunday Breakfast
9am-12pm Sunday Morning
12-1.30pm Private Passions
1.30-3pm Music Map
3-4pm Choral Evensong
4-5pm Jazz Record Requests
5-6pm The Early Music Show
6-7.15pm Words and Music
7.15-8pm Between the Ears Automata
8-10pm Drama on 3
10-11pm Ultimate Calm
11-11.30pm Night Tracks Mixtape

27 MONDAY

CHOICE 6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-2pm Live from Wigmore Hall
2-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Voices of Terezín
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

28 TUESDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Voices of Terezín
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Barbican, London. Mahler *Symphony No. 10 (Adagio)*, Vaughan Williams *Toward the Unknown Region*, Saariaho *Hush*, Vaughan Williams *The Lark Ascending*. BBC SO/Sakari Oramo
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

29 WEDNESDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-3pm Classical Live
3-4pm Choral Evensong
4-5pm Composer of the Week Voices of Terezín
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Queen Elizabeth Hall, London. Shirley J Thompson *Fanfare for Chineke!*, Julian Joseph *Carry That Sound*, Roderick Williams *Ethiopia Boy*, Witter-Johnson/Kidane/Thompson/Williams *Song of the Prophets: A Requiem for the Climate*, James B. Wilson *Free-man*, James B. Wilson/Yomi Sode *Remnants*. Chineke!/Matthew Kofi Waldren
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

30 THURSDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Voices of Terezín
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

31 FRIDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Voices of Terezín
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45 Friday Night is Music Night
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Late Junction
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

QUIZ ANSWERS from p 104

1. Jack the Ripper
2. Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*
3. Carlo Gesualdo
4. a) Erich Korngold; b) Benjamin Britten; c) John Adams
5. Metropolitan Opera House, New York
6. The violin
7. Inspector Morse
8. *Ludwig*
9. *Inspector Montalbano*
10. a) JS Bach; b) Ethel Smyth; c) Erik Satie

GETTY

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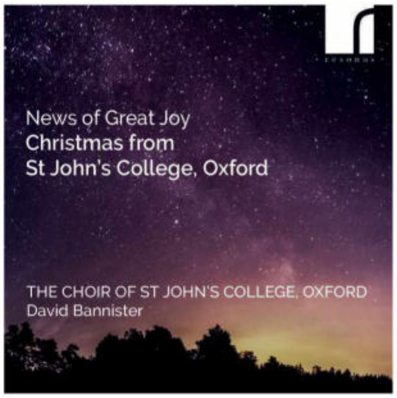
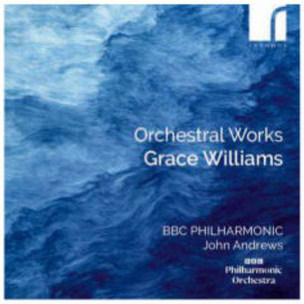

News of Great Joy
Christmas from
St John's College, Oxford
THE CHOIR OF ST JOHN'S COLLEGE, OXFORD
David Bannister

The Choir of St John's College, Oxford, directed by David Bannister, sing music associated with Christmas, together with youthful works by Imogen Holst and Benjamin Britten.

Looking towards the sixtieth anniversary of Elizabeth Poston's *Penguin Book of Carols* (1965), initially undertaken with Ralph Vaughan Williams, this recording presents music associated with these two composers and the works they edited, alongside newer pieces exemplifying and revivifying the English carol tradition.


Orchestral Works
Grace Williams
BBC PHILHARMONIC
John Andrews
BBC Philharmonic Orchestra

Grace Williams: Orchestral Works
BBC Philharmonic, John Andrews (conductor)

Lonely Landscape
Chamber Music and Song by
Pamela Harrison
James Gilchrist, Alice Neary, Jims Coleman
ROYAL WELSH CHAMBER PLAYERS

Pamela Harrison: Lonely Landscape –
Chamber Music & Song
Royal Welsh Chamber Players

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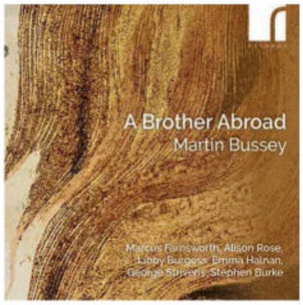
A Brother Abroad
Martin Bussey
Marcus Farnsworth, Alison Rose,
Libby Burgess, Emma Halnan,
George Strivens, Stephen Burke

Martin Bussey: A Brother Abroad
Marcus Farnsworth (baritone),
Libby Burgess (piano) et al

Barbara Strozzi
Voices of Longing
Love Songs from 17th Century Venice
Ceruleo

Strozzi: Voices of Longing – Love Songs from 17th Century Venice
Ceruleo

Xiaogang Ye
Chamber Music
The Fidelio Trio
& Friends

Xiaogang Ye: Chamber Music
The Fidelio Trio & Friends

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THE QUIZ

It'd be a crime not to tackle this month's ten questions...

1. Which notorious real-life London killer brings Berg's opera *Lulu* to a bloody end?

2. 'March to the scaffold' is the title of the fourth movement of which 1830 orchestral work?

3. Which composer murdered his wife and her lover after catching them *in flagrante* on 16 October 1590?

4. Who composed the following operas: a) *Die tote Stadt* (The Dead City; 1920); b) *Death in Venice* (1973); *The death of Klinghoffer* (1991)?

5. At which famous venue did the orchestral violinist Helen Hagnes Mintiks disappear during the interval of a performance on 23 July 1980, with her murdered body being disovered the next day?

6. Which instrument does detective Sherlock Holmes play to relax?

7. In an episode called 'Masonic Mysteries', which literary and TV detective takes part in a production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*?

8. An adaptation of Beethoven's 'Tempest' Piano Sonata No. 17 provides the theme tune to which TV detective series?

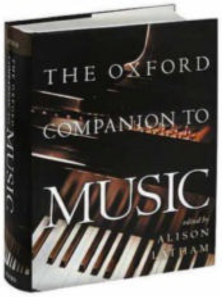
9. Granddaughter of Austrian conductor Karl Böhm, the actress Katharina Böhm (pictured above) played Livia, the girlfriend of the title character, in which TV detective series?

10. Name the composers jailed for the following: a) Demanding to be allowed to take up a new job (1717); b) Throwing stones at the house of an opponent of women's suffrage (1912); c) Calling a critic 'an unmusical arse' on a postcard (1917).

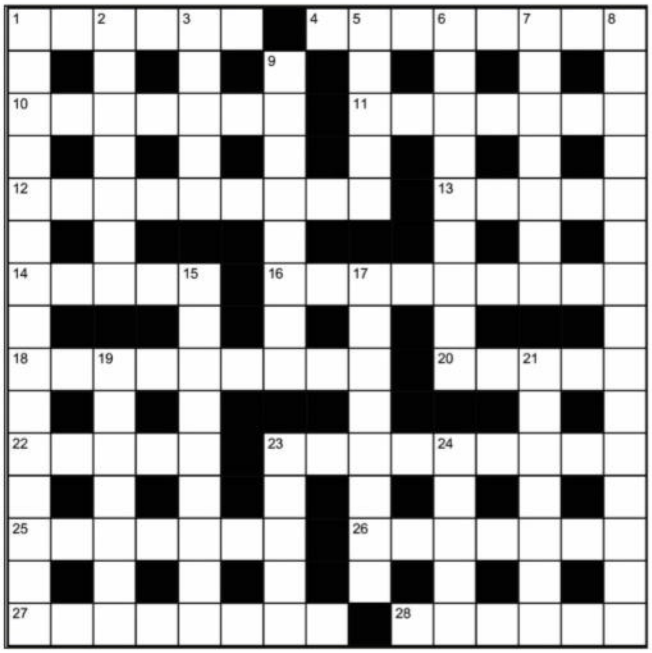
See p102 for answers

The *BBC Music Magazine* PRIZE CROSSWORD NO. 407

Crossword set by **Paul Henderson**



The first correct solution of our crossword picked at random will win a copy of **The Oxford Companion to Music.** A runner-up will win **Who Knew? Answers to Questions about Classical Music** (see oup.co.uk). Send answers to: *BBC Music Magazine*, Crossword 407/January 2025, PO Box 501, Leicester, LE94 0AA to arrive by 23 Jan 2025 (solution in April 2025 issue).



Your name & address ....

....

....

....

....

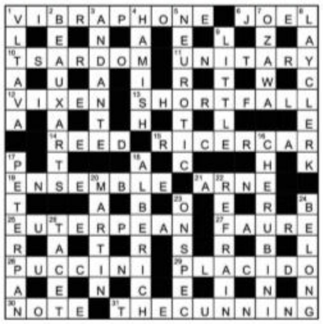
ACROSS

1 Thus our group heads for the original African location of quartet and gospel choir (6)
4 Initially ran to piano in wild desire and played again (8)
10 It's a time in past indicative of musical turbulence (7)
11 UK music played more slowly, joining Prince in dance (7)
12 Married poet invested in gift – a tuba (9)
13 Exhaust artist surrounded by 18 noise? (5)
14 Hurriedly put together roulade – start to use piano (3,2)
16 Very clever variation of Old English Uni song (9)
18 Having no ability in melody or harmony, alumnus upset about one college (9)
20 The Hispanic conclusion from Ravel is sprightly (5)
22 Jazz pianist hurries to capture note (5)
23 I'm basic, with no messing around regarding surround sound (9)
25 Vivaldi, perhaps, against keeping on with opening of opera (7)
26 Our group filling various roles for French composer (7)
27/28 I linger here, vaguely taking in ancient Russian composer (8,6)

DOWN

1 Blemish on bass over coarse, average folk song (11,4)
2 Successful song material initially penned by pale poet (7)
3 One leaving court case with a merry refrain? (3-2)
5 Opening of aria to decline – ends in offstage transition (5)
6 American weather ritual producing variety of arcane din (4,5)
7 Small musical work organised, supported by old singer (7)
8 French ballet has dolphin dance arranged (7,3,5)
9 Mark of big sales in good historic CDs, I fancy (4,4)
15 Add soundtrack to social media comment and slump audibly (4-5)
17 Famous commissioner offering medal for first Austrian composer (8)
19 Blokes, outrageous, heading for Italy to find Italian composer (7)
21 Selection of Dittersdorf in essence shows flair (7)
23 A sound of a bell heard in island (5)
24 Thomas work ultimately complete, barring initial prop for *Hamlet*? (5)

NOVEMBER SOLUTION
No. 404



1V	I	2B	R	3A	P	4H	O	5N	E	■	6J	7O	E	8L
L	■	E	■	N	■	A	■	E	■	9L	■	Z	■	A
10T	S	A	R	D	O	M	■	11U	N	I	T	A	R	Y
A	■	U	■	A	■	I	■	R	■	T	■	W	■	C
12V	I	X	E	N	■	13S	H	O	R	T	F	A	L	L
A	■	A	■	T	■	H	■	T	■	L	■	■	■	E
■	■	14R	E	E	D	■	15R	I	C	E	R	16C	A	R
17P	■	T	■	■	■	18A	■	C	■	■	■	H	■	K
19E	N	S	E	20M	B	L	E	■	21A	22R	N	E	■	■
T	■	■	■	A	■	B	■	23O	■	E	■	R	■	24B
25E	U	26T	E	R	P	E	A	N	■	27F	A	U	R	E
R	■	A	■	T	■	R	■	S	■	R	■	B	■	L
28P	U	C	C	I	N	I	■	29P	L	A	C	I	D	O
A	■	E	■	N	■	C	■	E	■	I	■	N	■	N
30N	O	T	E	■	31T	H	E	C	U	N	N	I	N	G

NOVEMBER WINNER

Brian Tipler, Stockport

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PLUS! Bach Collegium Japan founder ***Masaaki Suzuki*** talks to *Amanda Holloway*; *Jessica Duchen* looks at historical relations between ***opera composers and librettists***; *Andrew Green* investigates ***Furtwängler and the Nazis***; and we recommend the best recordings of ***Beethoven's Fourth Symphony***

GETTY

Competition terms and conditions Winners will be the senders of the first correct entries drawn at random. All entrants are deemed to have accepted the rules (see opposite) and agreed to be bound by them. The prizes shall be as stated and no cash alternatives will be offered. Competitions are open to UK residents only, except employees of Our Media Company Limited, the promoter and their agents. No purchase necessary. Only one entry per competition per person. Proof of postage is not proof of entry. Our Media Company Limited accepts no responsibility for entries lost or damaged in the post. Entrants agree to take part in any publicity related to these competitions. The judge's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. Entrants' personal details will not be used by Our Media Company Limited, publisher of *BBC Music Magazine*, for any other purpose than for contacting competition winners.

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Volume 33 No.4 *BBC Music Magazine* (ISSN 0966-7180) (USPS 018-168) is published 13 times a year by Our Media Ltd under licence from BBC Worldwide, Eagle House, Bristol BS1 4ST, UK.

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Distributed in the US by Circulation Specialists, Inc., 2 Corporate Drive, Suite 945, Shelton CT 06484-6238. Periodicals postage paid at Shelton, CT and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to BBC MUSIC, Immediate Media PO Box 401 Williamsport, PA 17703

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Canada $131.40 Rest of World £84.99

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Rachel Portman

Composer

Making history in 1996 as the first woman to win an Oscar for Best Original Score (for *Emma*), British composer Rachel Portman has enjoyed a long and fruitful career on the big screen and, more recently, in the concert hall. She begins 2025 with a new role mentoring aspiring young film composers from the Guildhall School, as part of an exciting new project with the London Symphony Orchestra.

The first piece of music I think I loved was the *Berceuse* from the *Dolly Suite* by **FAURÉ**, which is a piano piece for two hands. It was the theme tune for the radio programme *Listen with Mother* and my mother used to have it on in the ironing room. She listened to Radio 3 all the time, so that was my introduction to music. One of my earliest and most profound memories is of listening to the *Dolly Suite* on the radio and thinking, 'I really like that music.' There's something so familiar about it, and I think it probably introduced me to the piano, which is another reason I love it as much as I do. That was way before I discovered the piano for myself, though; I was only three or four.

Somebody in our village gave me a cassette featuring **JS BACH**'s Double Violin Concerto and other violin concertos, played by Yehudi Menuhin. He played them much more sweetly than people often play Bach's violin concertos. I will always love those recordings more than anything, because of the way he played them, but you actually can't get them now; I've searched on Spotify. Listening to that recording is when Bach really got under my skin – like for millions of people, I realise, but I knew the Double (and know it) so well. I played it later, when I was learning the violin. We had so few records and all the pieces of music that we had in the house were the records that my mother owned. They were so precious. You couldn't listen to everything and so you listened to things really intensely and they became part of you.

I remember being introduced to **RAVEL** when I was at school, doing my first year of A-levels. Our music teacher was actually also my violin teacher. He put on a record of Ravel's *Le tombeau de Couperin* and I'm pretty sure it was the orchestrated version and not the piano version. I'd never heard any music like it; and I may say this is true for all the pieces I'm choosing, but that piece had a really profound effect on me. There's something about the bittersweet way Ravel writes, apart from the orchestration; I find his music so moving. I love the melodies and I love the harmonies. I would have been at an age where I was already writing lots of music and I think I saw him as someone who was a great person to study, because he felt so much closer to me than a lot of the Classical and Romantic repertoire. I began to get much more interested in 20th-century music. Of course, then I discovered the piano versions, which I love too – they're beautiful.

I came across **SHOSTAKOVICH**'s Preludes and Fugues through the recording that Keith Jarrett made – though I can't believe I hadn't heard them before. I was working with Wayne Wang and Paul Auster on a film called *Smoke*. They wanted to use one of the fugues in a scene and I wanted them to use the music that I had written. In the end they did use the Shostakovich, though the rest of my music is all over the film; but I love those pieces because of their simplicity and the connection I feel with them. I'm interested in writing music that is not too complex and in writing directly and emotionally. So a lot of those little pieces I really connect with.

Víkingur Ólafsson's double album of Bach came out about the time I had just met my now-husband and it ended up being a recording we played at our wedding. That was when we were just coming out of the Covid lockdown in 2021 – we were still all wearing masks. I remember listening to it a lot; we loved the album, but we particularly loved the transcription of the Organ Sonata No. 4 and so we played it when we got married.

Interview by Michael Beek

GREGOR HOHENBERG

The choices

Fauré Dolly Suite – Berceuse
Eileen Brown, Roger Fiske (piano)
BBC MP 15848

JS Bach Double Concerto
Yehudi Menuhin, Christian Ferras (violin); Bath Festival Orchestra
Warner Classics 9029630357

Ravel Le tombeau de Couperin
Concertgebouw Orchestra/Bernard Haitink
Philips 730 571

Shostakovich Preludes & Fugues for Piano Keith Jarrett (piano)
ECM 4371892

JS Bach Organ Sonata No. 4, BWV 528 (Trans. Stradal)
Víkingur Ólafsson (piano)
Deutsche Grammophon 483 5022

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Introducing...Igor Balakirev

Russia's emerging contemporary composer and songwriter

Great-Grand Nephew of Mily Balakirev

"WINTER" VIDEO SINGLE

Influenced by Pushkin's poem

"Hard frost and sunshine - a day of pleasure!
You are still drowsy at your leisure
It's time my beauty, open your eyes
Let you get free of blissful dreaming
To meet the North Aurora, gleaming
The Star of North, let you arise"

Video exclusively on YouTube:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0Gx_o93syQ

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